

All Water is Holy: Ecological Catechesis For Baptism

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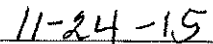
**All Water is Holy:
Ecological Catechesis for the Baptism
Of Infants and Children in the Catholic Church**

Mary Dodge

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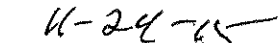
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Abstract

This study acknowledges an intrinsic relationship between the water in the baptismal font and the Earth's water for a greater appreciation of the meaning of Baptism, as well as for the holiness of all water. This is the fundamental presupposition of this dissertation. Baptism is the beginning of new life in the Christian faith. There is full recognition in the Catholic tradition that the water in baptismal fonts, having been blessed by a priest, is holy water. This dissertation asserts that the Earth's water, blessed by God who called it good at the moment of creation, is intrinsically holy and, therefore, should be valued and respected as is baptismal water.

Believing that the sacrament of Baptism and the Earth's water are partners, I present an ecological approach that looks at Baptism through the lens of the historical and contemporary significance of the sacrament revealed within scripture, church tradition, and contemporary practice. I document the voices of experience, culture, and religious tradition as they relate their insights into the issues that concern the pollution and degradation of the Earth's water sources. Each of these conversation partners is heard in anticipation of offering a pastoral response regarding possible catechetical and liturgical practice that takes seriously the mutual relationship between the sacrament of Baptism and the preservation of the Earth's water.

An ecological sacramental approach values the primacy of Baptism in the process of Christian initiation as it considers the abuse and misuse of the Earth's water. I propose that the meaning and lasting impact of the sacrament is clarified as the symbolism of water in all its natural forms is recognized and appreciated as the blessed gift of life God has shared with all creation.

Acknowledgments

My dissertation is rooted in a love for the sacrament of baptism and a desire to protect the Earth's water. This has been true for many years, but it is only through the encouragement and guidance of persons in my life that I was able to bring these together in a meaningful way to create this work. I am grateful to all the family members, friends, mentors, and teachers who have helped me gain a greater appreciation of the meaning of baptism, as well as for the magnificence and beauty of oceans, rivers, streams, and springs.

I am particularly grateful to my dissertation committee, Drs. Mary Carter Waren, my committee chairperson, Terry Veling, and Jonathan Roach. Dr. Waren's unsurpassed generosity of time, talent, and intuitive wisdom was the support that enabled me to continue when I felt like giving up, and to explore more fully the meaning of my words. Dr. Veling's unique insights into practical theology and the ways it speaks to the world provided a vision that allowed me to see the whole work as I created each piece. Dr. Roach's comprehensive knowledge of style and appreciation for helpful attitudes for dissertation writing allowed me to write with greater clarity and dedication. I will always be grateful for the gifts they shared.

My gratitude extends to Dr. Bryan Froehle, the director of the doctoral program at St. Thomas University, who believed in me and whose consistent encouragement and valuable support helped me move the process forward with greater comfort.

Along with these people and many more I am grateful to the oceans I play in, the rivers whose rocks provide a place to pray and read, and the waterfalls that revealed God's

great power. The joy, beauty, and pleasure they have provided are the heart of this dissertation.

Dedication

I dedicate all the love and energy I put into this work to my two wonderful grandchildren, Drew and Sawyer. Although they may be too young to appreciate how they motivated their grandmother to create this dissertation, I know it was my love for them and their love for the ocean that continued to push me to the finish line. Thank you!

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Chapter One:

Introduction

I stood on the shore taking in the beauty of the water and listening to the rhythmic sound of the waves as they flowed in, washing my feet. It was not until the group followed my son and daughter-in-law carrying their precious baby into the ocean that I realized this immense body of water was soon to become my granddaughter's baptismal font. That realization awakened again the appreciation of God's magnificent power and God's way of being in the world with us. The presider bathed the baby in the warm summer water as the community prayed the prayers for baptism, asking God to touch her and all of us with the grace and power of the sacrament. One of the prayers in the *Catholic Rite of Baptism* of a child says, "my dear brothers and sisters, God uses the sacrament of water to give his divine life to those who believe in him."¹ The ocean water is the sacramental symbol of the divine life that will continue to empower all of humanity long after all leave this place. Of course, the children who had been playing in the water, not wanting to leave though the ritual had ended, continued to splash and soak one another as everyone walked back to the shore. Their playfulness reminded me of the way God is so present in our joyful experiences – a God who plays with us each time the human person rejoices in all God has created. The celebration continued for hours next to the ocean as if to say thank you for the wonderful gift it offered that day.

A child's baptism is a celebration not only of the divine life bestowed upon the child but also a blessing to the parents who are their children's' primary educators in faith formation. The blessing of the mother and father included in the *Rite of Baptism* names

¹ *Rite of Baptism of a Child*, English translation, (Milwaukee, WI: International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc. 1969) 7.

them as “the first teachers of their child in the ways of faith.”² Their willingness to make a commitment to the Christian life on behalf of their child presupposes their intention to model a life of love. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* expresses it like this: “parents have the first responsibility for the education of their children. They bear witness to this responsibility first by creating a home where tenderness, forgiveness, respect, fidelity, and disinterested service are the rule.”³ However, a family’s home life is impacted by social interactions that reach well beyond the house’s walls. Thus, *family* becomes synonymous with the larger world that influences the choices parents make on behalf of their children. So what began as an immersion in divine life in the ocean water surfaced and evolved into lives of Christian faith that have far-reaching implications; the water that baptized becomes symbolic of the life of faith that flows from the home to the space in the world the family encounters.

Living with Water

Christiana Peppard, professor of theology and science at Fordham University, clearly demonstrates why water is the essential element for human existence. She writes, “whether you see it or not, fresh water is the substance that constitutes the very baseline of your existence. At birth, each person is composed of roughly 75 percent water, and we remain predominately water for most of our lives. Our aqueous bodies can survive not even a week without it. Fresh water is a condition of existence in cosmic and evolutionary senses, as well as in ecological, societal, civilization and individual terms.”⁴

² *Ibid.*, 15.

³ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1994) 537.

⁴ Christiana Z. Peppard, *Just Water: Theology, Ethics, and the Global Water Crisis* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2014), 19.

Although the oceans hold about ninety-six percent of this precious resource, making it saline and unavailable for human consumption, the miracle of nature's water cycle – the process that is constantly moving the seemingly small percentage of water that is available from one place to another and one form to another – provides the fresh water necessary for human and non-human existence.⁵ The cycle begins with the sun's energy warming the waters in the oceans, seas, and land masses, creating vapors that are transferred into the atmosphere. These vapors develop into cloud formations. Thomas Berry describes the hydrological cycle as:

a fantastic engineering feat..To draw water up out of the seas, to lift it over the continents, to pour it down over the countryside, the valleys, to nourish the trees, then gather it into the streams, to nourish the life there and then to flow back to the sea, with nutrients for sea life – it is all a vast engineering, biological, and chemical enterprise.⁶

Berry's sense of the cycle is a poetic description of nature's ability to care for all life forms. He paints a picture of water rising up from the seas into the heavens in order to wash over the earth and to flow down into the small bodies of water that support the flourishing of plants and trees that line their banks. These streams, ponds, and canals, are sources of nourishment for multitudes of birds, fish, and wildlife that renew themselves in their waters. The water then makes its way back into sea to begin the process anew. The more scientific explanation of the hydrological cycle notes:

⁵ Howard Perlman, "How Much Water is There on, in, and above the Earth?" *USGS Water Science School*, December 15, 2014, <http://water.usgs.gov/edu/earthhowmuch.html>.

⁶ Thomas Berry and Thomas Clarke, *Befriending the Earth* (Mystic, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1992), 99.

The clouds are carried by weather patterns, which are influenced by the topography of the earth's surface. Sometimes vapor condenses as fog, mist, or clouds, and sometimes it falls to the earth as precipitation, where it is accumulated in surface water and the soil. Then the process of recycling, or returning the water back into the atmosphere, continues.⁷

Both of these descriptions expose the marvel of the water cycle – a process that creates a never-ending kinship between the earth's atmosphere and all that lives on the surface, dropping the heavens into our own back yard. Astoundingly, four percent of water available for consumption becomes sufficient to sustain and nourish all life on earth. This is the greatness of water.

It is obvious that water is a condition for survival of all life forms, but how does it sustain the human body? The United States Geological Survey reports:

Water serves a number of essential functions to keep us all going. It is a vital nutrient to the life of every cell; it regulates our internal body temperature by sweating and respiration; the carbohydrates and proteins that our bodies use as food are metabolized and transported by water in the bloodstream; acts as a shock absorber for brain, spinal cord, and fetus; and lubricates joints.⁸

Whether humans are consciously aware of this or not, water is constantly flowing through the body, renewing, rejuvenating, and restoring health to vital organs. Likely, they do not often think about these internal processes, but humans do know the pleasure of a cold drink of water to satisfy thirst, or the refreshing feeling of a cool swim on a hot summer day, or the comfort of washing off the dirt after a hard day's work. These experiences of water are

⁷ "The Water Cycle – Nature's Recycling System," *USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service*, October 14, 2005, <http://www.nrcs.usda.gov/wps/portal/nrcs/detail/national/water/?&cid=stelprdb1046868>.

⁸ Howard Perlman, "The Water in You," *The USGS Water Science School*, December 15, 2014, USGS.gov <http://water.usgs.gov/edu/propertyyou.html>.

reflections of the internal satisfaction water provides human organs and bodily functions without which life could not be sustained.

Water as Symbol

In theology the Greek word *symbaleo* means to throw together. Humans are thrown into Earth's water story- a story that, in Judaeo/Christian theology, begins with "and God said, 'let the waters under the sky be gathered together into one place, and let the dry land appear.'"⁹ The creation story depicts divine goodness exploding into a physical reality; in subsequent verses humans enter the story and begin to interact with the world around them. As people are thrown into the midst of all that divine goodness has seen fit to create it becomes the human task to understand and care for God's gifts, each of which is symbolic of God's presence within creation. As Thomas Aquinas explains,

God produced many and diverse creatures, so that what was wanting to one in representation of the divine goodness might be supplied by another...hence the whole universe together participates in the divine goodness more perfectly, and represents it better than any single creature whatever.¹⁰

It is a challenging but marvelous task to appreciate everything in the world around as representative of divine goodness, as symbolic of divine presence. The process allows for humans to be immersed within all that exists in ways that provide an opening for an experience of God in our particular time and space. David Power speaks to this experience, "the communion with the world of creation is already a communion with a loving and saving God, because in the action of creation itself there is a divine self-communication,

⁹ *The Holy Bible: Catholic Study Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011). Genesis 1:9.

¹⁰ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theological*, Prima Pars, questions 48 and 2. Translated by the Fathers of the English Dominican Province, (Vatican City: Benziger Brothers Printers to the Holy Apostolic See, 1917).

whereby there is a divine presence in all things.”¹¹ However, the challenge lies in a continuing consciousness of the ways humans interact with and impact their time and space, mindful of the negative consequences their actions may have on non-human creation. Since the act of creation authored a symbiotic relationship between humanity and the world they inhabit, the many and diverse creatures depend on one another to reflect divine presence; together the whole of creation becomes symbolic of God with them.

Since water is the resource most necessary for all life it is understandable that it has become an essential symbol of Divine presence. As Goethe professes, “the soul of man resembles water: from heaven it comes, to heaven it soars. And then again to earth descends, changing ever.”¹² Since symbols are multi-dimensional necessitating interpretation, appreciating water’s symbolism is a complex process that attempts to unveil a deeper reality than is present on the surface. As Joseph Martos explains, “symbols tend to affect us complexly and we tend to respond to them complexly.”¹³ He demonstrates this complexity as it relates to water as symbol when he writes,

Water is a natural symbol, not only in the sense that it is found in nature but also in the sense that it naturally lends itself to symbolizing many things. Water cleanses, and many religious people wash themselves as a sign that they want to be or have been made clean spiritually as well as physically. Water refreshes, and in some religions, bathing in rivers enables people to experience a regeneration of energy and to feel connected to the source of that energy. Water gives life, and so initiation rituals which mark the beginning of a new way of life often involve

¹¹ David N. Power, *Sacrament: The Language of God’s Giving* (New York: Crossroad, 1999), 57.

¹² Johann Wolfgang von Goethe, “Spirit Song over the Waters-Poem by Johann Wolfgang von Goethe,” February 5, 2015, <http://www.poemhunter.com/best-poems/johann-wolfgang-von-goethe/spirit-song-over-the-waters.html>.

¹³ Joseph Martos, *The Sacraments: An Interdisciplinary and Interactive Study* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009), 16.

washing or immersion in water. But water also brings death, and so in some religious myths water symbolizes the chaotic state of things before life began.¹⁴

The complex nature of symbols does not diminish or negate their power to communicate an experience of reality that might not be revealed through words alone. However, their complexity necessitates exposure to a clear understanding of their meaning within the current experience. As Bernard Cooke explains, “symbols must have more than an abstract agreed-upon significance; they must be truly living symbols.”¹⁵ Symbols come alive when they originate from our human experience and reach across boundaries to promote a communal acceptance of their meaning. In doing, so they become the source of “sacred moments,” moments when “our depths resonate with the web of life.”¹⁶ Sacramental symbols have the power to intimately connect moments of religious significance to the lived experiences that are at the core of human existence. Bernard Cooke explains the power of symbols when he says, “they not only give us information and understanding; they touch our imaginations, emotions, desires and loves and they trigger our decisions and activities.”¹⁷ It is this *triggering* that allows the water of baptism to speak to our attitudes and actions as we engage the earth’s waters, appreciating their sacramental nature that evokes the same recognition of the divine we experienced in the sacrament. However, as Michael Cowan explains, “when the symbolic worlds of everyday life and of religious rituals are too far removed from each other, a split in the consciousness of believers is the inevitable result.”¹⁸ This separation affects the possibility of the emergence of a conscious

¹⁴ Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred* (Liguori, MO: Liguori/Triumph, 2001), 148.

¹⁵ Bernard Cooke, *Sacraments and Sacramentality* (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1994), 50.

¹⁶ Michael A. Cowan, “Sacramental Moments,” *Alternative Futures for Worship*, Vol. 1, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1987) 35-56.

¹⁷ Bernard Cooke, *Sacraments and Sacramentality*, (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1994), 46.

¹⁸ Michael A. Cowan, “Sacramental Moments,” *Alternative Futures for Worship*, Vol.1, (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1987) 42.

regard for the relationship between the water of baptism and the earth's water. Religious rituals are intended to bring reality into focus in ways that expose the presence of God in the here and now – God present as fully in everyday life as God is present within the ritual. When this occurs there is not separation between the two.

Why Water/ Why Baptism?

I am a practical theologian in love with water, and a religious educator who, over many years of catechizing children and their parents, recognizes the power of symbol – whether it is ocean water or the water in baptismal fonts. My granddaughter's baptism in the Atlantic Ocean along the shores of South Florida is correlative to the numerous baptisms in church fonts that I experienced as a director of religious education. These seemingly dissimilar celebrations of the sacrament are dual expressions of the way water, in all its forms, symbolizes the mystery of divine-human interaction.

The water of baptism is not merely a disposable symbol that mechanistically connects humans to a higher reality; it has intrinsic value and points to the reality that all water is holy. It offers a sign that, through baptism, people enter into an Earth-honoring Christian faith. It signifies that the earth-human community is inextricably connected because water is the substance that sustains every member. As David Clowney and Patricia Mosto propose, it reminds people that “if our behavior matched our needs as a species, we would respect water, maintain its natural reservoirs, and safeguard its purity.”¹⁹ Benjamin Stewart beautifully expresses the message of baptismal water; the waters of baptism “call forth our sustained attention to the ecological marvels of water- in order to appreciate the very real physical blessings water provides to the earth, and also because we find in water

¹⁹ David Clowney and Patricia Mosto, eds., *Earthcare: An Anthology in Environmental Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2009) 465.

flowing over the landscape...images of the overflowing blessings of God.”²⁰ The appreciation of water as a creative and sustaining force inherent in both the science of ecology and sacramental theology allows for an affirmative response to John Haught’s question “whether the religions of the world have the resources to contribute anything of substance to the resolution of our current ecological predicament.”²¹ Both Catholic theologians and the scientific community raise concerns over the integrity of Earth’s water supply; this project offers a theological response to that crisis.

As a religious educator for many years, I catechized hundreds of parents seeking baptism for their children. I was conscientious about making clear the blessed relationship with God and the Catholic community baptism offers, how the baptismal water symbolizes these relationships, and how their infant might cry when the cold water is poured on her/his head. I engaged parents and godparents in conversation regarding the commitment they are undertaking in asking that the child they bring to the sacrament receive the divine life in Christ; that they are committed to forming her/him in the faith. Looking back with my wider view of how this commitment extends to honoring all that God has created, I realize I could have included in that conversation an appreciation of the critical link between the water in the font, water in the world beyond the church doors, and clean water shortage in many parts of the world. My current awareness of the absence of this catechesis motivates this project as I question whether baptism preparation is an opportunity to transform our relationship with water.

Water is the unifying source for all living beings, making it a viable symbol to connect the human community to the earth’s natural resources. The editors of *Earthcare*

²⁰ Benjamin M. Stewart, “Water in Worship: The Ecology in Baptism,” *Christian Century*, 128, 2011, 3.

²¹ John Haught, *The Promise of Nature: Ecology and Cosmic Purpose* (New York: Paulist Press, 1993) 2.

explain that “water connects, with all its simplicity, all aspects of human existence. It set the stage for the evolution of life, remains an essential ingredient for life, and is a most precious resource to humans.”²² So too, Baptism is initiation into new life with Christ and the Christian community, an essential experience for living the fullness of life Christ offered those who follow his way. The water of Baptism sets the stage for an evolution of Christian life that recognizes and practices *earth-honoring*²³ Christian faith. Thus, the water in the font and the waters that flow throughout the earth are the waters of life. Theologian Larry Rasmussen expresses this with passion. He writes,

Sane people should do some good whooping and stomping with a little shimmer and splash, when they encounter a thing so miraculous as water! You were born in it, your mother’s warm womb waters, and it’s surer than taxes that you die without it. Millions have lived without love, but no critter in all creation has lived without water. Life itself likely emerged from the waters of the sea, and most life is still in the salty brine. Water births, it cleanses, it purifies, it heals, it revives, it transports. It rains down and wells up....The waters of life. Maybe, just maybe, all waters are sacramental.²⁴

There is no disputing that the water in Baptism fonts are sacramental in that they initiate and point to a divine-human relationship, but are they also symbolic of the sacramentality, the pointing to the divine, of all living water? Is it possible to assert, with Rasmussen, that “all waters are sacramental?” The spiritual nature of water has been imbedded in religious traditions throughout history. In fact, “it would lead us too far to

²² David Clowney and Patricia Mosto, eds. *Earthcare: An Anthology in Environmental Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2009) 63.

²³ I chose this expression to denote a Christian faith that recognizes divine life and goodness in all of creation, and makes a commitment to live the Christian life respecting all that exists.

²⁴ Larry Rasmussen, “The Baptized Life,” December 18, 2014, <http://thefreelibrary.com/the+baptized+life.-a0167512203>.

mention all the myths and customs in which water appears as an image or reflection of the soul; an awareness that the soul recognizes itself when it beholds water – finding animation in its play, refreshment in its rest, and purity in its clarity.”²⁵ Nevertheless, to come to a greater appreciation of religious traditions’ sensibility regarding the holiness of all water, it is helpful to explore the teachings of non-Christian writings which testify to water’s ability to reveal the presence of divinity.

The religious sensibility that water purifies the spirit as well as the body is evident in the earliest of traditions. Writing from the Hindu perspective, O. P. Dwivedi explains, “water is considered by Hindus a powerful media of purification and also a source of energy. Sometimes just by the sprinkling of water in religious ceremonies, it is believed purity is achieved.”²⁶ Interestingly, Hindus believed water must be pure in order for it to purify; therefore, Dwivedi continues, “one should not cause urine, stool, cough in the water. Anything mixed with these unpius objects, blood and poison, should not be thrown into water.”²⁷ Present day Hinduism continues to regard water as a sacred resource. Clearest evidence of this is their respect for the Ganges River. Dwivedi explains, Its water is held to be pure from beginning to end, and in fact it is preserved from all pollution by the fine sand which it drags along with it. Whoever, with repentant mind, bathes in the Ganges, is freed from all his sins: inner purification here finds its symbolic support in the outward purification that comes from the water of the sacred river. It is as if the purifying water came from Heaven, for its origin in the eternal ice of the roof of the world is like a symbol of the heavenly origin of divine grace which as “living water,”

²⁵ Titus Burckhardt, “The Symbolism of Water,” in *Seeing God Everywhere: Essays on Nature and the Sacred*, edited by Barry McDonald (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, Inc., 2003) 209.

²⁶ O. P. Dwivedi, “Satayagraha for Conservation: Awakening the Spirit of Hinduism,” in *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, edited by Roger S. Gottlieb (New York: Routledge, 2004), 151.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 152.

springs from timeless and immutable Peace.²⁸ Within the Christian tradition references to the living water that flows from sincere belief in the power of God are also evident. For Hindus, this water is a physical reality that is available to them every time they enter the sacred Ganges.

Similarly, the Buddhist philosophy emphasizes maintaining the purity of Earth's water by avoiding any human contamination of its sources. Water conservation and the preservation of the natural world are of paramount importance for Buddhists as they look to Buddha for guidance. Chatsumarn Kablesingh explains, "it is astonishing to see that he actually set down rules forbidding his disciples to contaminate water resources. For example, monks were dissuaded from throwing their waste or leftover food into rivers and lakes, and they were urged to guard the lives of all living things abiding there."²⁹ The Buddha compared the human mind – source of a blessed life – to Earth's waters, as Burckhardt notes, "suppose there is a pool of water, pure, tranquil, and unstirred where a man can see oysters and shells, pebbles and gravel, and schools of fish. Just so an untroubled mind."³⁰ Continuing today, a parallel relationship exists between human nature within and the care and concern for the natural world. His Holiness the Dalai Lama of Tibet recently expressed, "the most important thing is to have a peaceful heart. Only when we understand the true nature lying within can we live harmoniously with the rest of the natural world."³¹ The Buddhist appreciation of the symbiotic relationship between the tranquil pool of water and the peaceful heart enables the Buddhist to experience life's joy

²⁸ Titus Burckhardt, "The Symbolism of Water," in *Seeing God Everywhere: Essays on Nature and the Sacred*, edited by Barry McDonald (Bloomington, IN: World Wisdom, 2003) 209.

²⁹ Chatsumarn Kablesingh, "Early Buddhist Views on Nature," in *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, edited by Roger S. Gottlieb (New York: Routledge 2004) 132.

³⁰ Ibid.

³¹ Ibid., 133.

within the present moment, and to abandon the impulse to use nature's gifts for selfish ends.

Within the Islam tradition concern over the preservation of water sources is subsumed into the Muslim respect for the entire natural world. The *Quran* confirms the Buddhist belief that humans must not defile and contaminate nature through reckless use of its resources. Although the Islamic Holy Book reveals that God has created all for human use:

(it is) God who created the heavens and the Earth, and sent down water from the sky, and brought forth fruits by means of it as a provision for you. And He has made the ships to be of service unto you, that they may sail the sea by His command, and the rivers He has made for service unto you. And He has made the sun and the moon, constant in their courses, to be of service unto you, and He has made of service unto you, the night and day. And he gives you all you would seek of Him: if you count the bounty of God, you could never reckon it.³²

Humans are responsible to maintain the equilibrium of all God has created by treating all of creation with respect so that the bounty God has provided remains for all generations.

'Service unto you' is not synonymous with using creation to satisfy human needs to the degradation of the earth's resources; rather it is a responsibility God has given to humanity so that the equilibrium of creation may be maintained.

The Jewish scriptures are laden with elaborate descriptions of the power of nature, recounting its intimate relationship to the people who lived off the land. The Jewish people recognized that the land they inhabit belongs to God; it, therefore, is holy ground upon which one walks carefully and respectfully. Their beneficent regard for the land

³² A. J. Droge. *The Quran: A New Annotated Translation* (Bristol, CT: Equinox Publishing, 2013) 14:32-34.

intermingled with their equally respectful consideration of water, as the earth that yields their harvest depends upon the water for nourishment. The Psalms often describe the relationship between the land and the water, “you visit the earth and water it, you greatly enrich it; the river of God is full of water; you provide the people with grain, for so you have prepared it. You water its furrows abundantly, settling its ridges, softening it with showers, and blessing its growth.”³³ The Jewish people understood that God owned the land and all that accompanies it; the hand of God moves continuously over creation providing all that is necessary to sustain them until He comes to rule the earth. The anticipation of God’s coming motivated the care they exercised toward all God created; all must be protected so that it could rejoice with them when God arrives. “Let the heavens rejoice and the earth exult! Let the sea and all within it thunder, the fields and everything in them exult! Then shall all the forest trees shout for joy, at the presence of the Eternal One who is coming to rule the earth.”³⁴ God had gifted the people with all they needed to sustain them as they waited for God to save them from the evil that sought to destroy them and their land. Gottlieb notes that:

In a world where warfare typically included efforts by the victor to degrade drastically the environment of the vanquished – cutting down trees, fouling waters, and salting the earth – our forbears behaved exceptionally, in all senses of the word. They developed the principle of *bal tash-chit*, do not destroy (Deuteronomy 20:19). Do not cut down tree seven to prevent ambush or to build

³³ *The Holy Bible: Catholic Study Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011), Psalm 65:9-10.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, Psalm 96:11-12.

siege engines; do not foul waters or burn crops even to cause an enemies submission.³⁵

For the early Jewish people there would never be a circumstance that would warrant destruction of the environment or abuse of anything that has come from the hand of God. It must remain as God created it so God would be pleased when God came to walk among them. The natural world was the visible sign of the power God would demonstrate as he saved them from their enemies. This was their covenantal relationship with a God who promised them that He would be their God and they would be his people.

Jewish history tells a story of a people struggling to hold on to the land God ordained for them within the promised covenant, but “they often found themselves living in crowded ghettos out of touch with the natural world...thus, it is not surprising that most people, including most Jews, are unaware that Judaism was one of the first great environmental religions.”³⁶ Judaism’s origins speak to a relationship with the creator that honors all that has come from the hand of God.

Christianity emerged from this land-loving tradition in the midst of the turmoil the Jews encountered as they attempted to remain true to their covenant with God. Early Christians – many of whom remained true to their Jewish roots – continued to see the face of God in the natural world. Although Lynn White, professor of medieval history, blames the Judaeo/ Christian tradition for the current ecological crisis in his essay “The Historical Roots of our Ecological Crisis,” there is much evidence throughout Christian history to support their respect for the Divine hand of God within all of creation. White’s thesis set

³⁵ Roger S. Gottlieb, *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment* (New York: Routledge, 2004) 93-94.

³⁶ David Ehrenfeld and Philip Bentley, “Judaism and the Practice of Stewardship,” in *Earthcare: An Anthology in Environmental Ethics* edited by David Clowney and Patricia Mosto (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2009) 63.

off a firestorm of debates regarding the role Christianity plays in the degradation of the natural world. White contends that the Genesis creation stories established a belief system that set man over nature, opening a path to a diminishment of the inherent value of the natural world. In response to his own question he asks, “what did Christianity tell people about their relations with the environment?” White argues,

By gradual stages a loving and all powerful God had created light and darkness, the heavenly bodies, and earth and all its plants, animals, birds, and fishes.

Finally, God had created Adam, and, as an afterthought, Eve to keep man from being lonely (Genesis, chapter 2). Man named all the animals, thus establishing his dominance over them. God planned all of this explicitly for man’s benefit and rule: no item in the physical creation had any purpose save to serve man’s purposes. And, although man’s body is made of clay, he is not simply part of nature: he is made in God’s image.³⁷

Proponents and opponents of White’s thesis engaged in debate that long impacted the question of Christianity’s role in addressing the ecological crisis. This paper will not enter that argument but acknowledge it as a starting point for a discussion of Christianity’s regard for the natural world. Commenting on White’s position, Celia Deanne-Drummond suggests “he has, arguably, influenced a generation of both secular and Christian scholars, with many of the former dismissing Christianity as a valid resource for responsible ecological action.”³⁸ I would agree with Deanne-Drummond that blaming Christianity for the current ecological crisis is simplistic, and what is required is a more in-depth approach

³⁷ Lynn White, The Historical Roots of Our Ecological Crisis, *Science* 10 March 1967: 1203-1207.

³⁸ Celia Deanne-Drummond, *Eco-Theology*, (Winona, MN: St. Mary’s Press, 2008) 82.

to the question whether dominion in Genesis means domination over or a responsibility to care for all God created.

The foundational Christian belief is that Jesus is the incarnate God, taking on flesh and blood and walking the earth engaging with the natural world in a very human way. As Karl Rahner explains, “The statement of God’s incarnation - of God’s becoming *material* – is the most basic statement of Christology.”³⁹ It is this incarnation that creates an attitude within Christianity that the Divine and human mingle with one another, making all that exists blessed. Elizabeth Johnson agrees with Rahner when she says:

Viewing Jesus as God-with-us in this way entails a belief not at all self-evident for monotheistic faith which Christians share with Jewish and Muslim traditions. It affirms the radical notion that the one transcendent God who creates and empowers the world freely chooses to join this world in the flesh so that it becomes a part of God’s own divine story.⁴⁰

God’s story describes a created world that exists both to honor and reveal a loving God who cares for all that exists; a divinity that is so entangled with the material world that God chose to become unified with it by walking among all God had made and blessed. Within this action God revealed the divine disposition toward both human and non-human creation. All are characters within the story and all are necessary to the plot.

Scriptural accounts that reveal Divine care for the natural world demonstrate Jesus’ appreciation of God nurturing all creation. Matthew’s gospel provides an account of Jesus reassuring his followers that God is with them just as he cares for the birds of the air and

³⁹ Karl Rahner, “Christology Within an Evolutionary View of the World,” in *Theological Investigations Concerning Vatican Council II*, Vol. VI (New York: Seabury, 1975) 176.

⁴⁰ Elizabeth Johnson, *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* (London, England: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014) 197.

the lilies in the field.⁴¹ Further, since Jesus is the *imago Dei* he demonstrates this Divine care for both human and non-human creation, demonstrating what it means to have *dominion over* all creation. Paul's Letter to the Colossians begins with the same description of Jesus as image of God that is borne out in all that has been created: "he is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation; for in him all things in heaven and on earth were created, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominations or rulers or powers – all things have been created through him and for him."⁴² Pope John Paul II points out what the doctrine of the incarnation means for non-human creation when he writes, The Incarnation of God signifies the taking up into unity with God not only of human nature, but in *this human nature, in a sense, of everything that is "flesh"*: the whole of humanity, the entire visible and material world. The Incarnation, then, also has a cosmic significance and a cosmic dimension. The "first-born of all creation," becoming incarnate in the individual humanity of Christ, unites himself in some way with the entire reality of humanity, which is also "flesh" – and in this reality with all "flesh," with the whole of creation.⁴³ Maintaining a balance between Jesus' human nature and the cosmic dimension of which Pope John Paul II speaks has been a challenge within ecotheology's affirmation of the incarnation. Cosmic Christology takes its inspiration from Colossians 1:15-20. The context of this hymn is one where the author addresses a situation where the person of Jesus was depreciated and his ordinary humanness stressed so that his divinity was obscured. In addition, they sought to separate the cosmic from the anthropological world in

⁴¹ *The Holy Bible: Catholic Study Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011) Matthew 6:25-30.

⁴² *Ibid.*, Colossians 1:15-17

⁴³ *Dominum et Vivificatum* [On the Holy Spirit in the Life of the Church and the World] (Rome: Vatican City, 1986) a.50.

a form of world-denying asceticism. Paul countered this view by celebrating the extent and scope of Christ's significance in cosmic terms.⁴⁴

However, with the emphasis in Christology on the human Jesus an appreciation of the cosmic Christ – the firstborn of all creation – faded, obscuring the equally significant message that the incarnation expresses not only Jesus in the flesh as human being but also the Christ in relationship with all created things. In the twentieth century theologians Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Matthew Fox, and Thomas Berry, among others, re-introduced a cosmic Christology that invigorated a creation spirituality restoring all *flesh* to the redemptive action God intended.

The Principle of Sacramentality

God's Grandeur

The world is charged with the grandeur of God.
It will flame out, like shining from shook foil;
It gathers to a greatness, like the ooze of oil
Crushed. Why do men then now not reck his rod?
Generations have trod, have trod, have trod;
And all is seared with trade; bleared, smeared with toil;
And wears man's smudge and shares man's smell: the soil
Is bare now, nor can foot feel, being shod.
And for all this, nature is never spent;
Oh, morning, at the brown brink eastward, springs—
Because the Holy Ghost over the bent
World broods with warm breast and with ah! bright wings.⁴⁵

⁴⁴ Celia Deane-Drummond, *Eco-Theology* (Winona, MN: St. Mary's Press, 2008) 101.

Care for the created world found in religious traditions evolved into principles honoring the natural world as expressions of Divine presence. One such principle within the Catholic tradition is the principle of sacramentality. Although the term is a relatively recent description of the Catholic worldview, it has been implicit in the tradition from its roots when God saw everything that God had made was very good. (Genesis 1:31) This principle provides a culture of meaning that respects the goodness of the natural world. In *The Catholic Imagination* Andrew Greeley describes sacramentality as a “religious sensibility which inclines Catholics to see the holy lurking in creation... it sees created reality as a *sacrament*, that is, a revelation of the presence of God”⁴⁶ Greeley, arguably, contrasts this with the Protestant perspective that “emphasizes the absence of God from the world.”⁴⁷ He proposes that classical Protestant writers “stress the distance between God and His creation”⁴⁸ while Catholic writers stress God’s nearness; the difference is between God’s transcendence and God’s immanence. Greeley acknowledges that both are necessary images of God. It is, however, this Catholic sacramentality that provides the impetus to God’s grandeur within all of creation.

As essential as the principle of sacramentality is to the Catholic belief system, care must be taken to avoid creating an artificial difference between Protestant traditions and Catholicism as it relates to the sacredness of creation. Protestant voices, particularly feminist theologians, have been heard from their beginnings to the present speaking on behalf of God’s presence within the natural world. Christian theologian Sallie McFague metaphorically names creation as the body of God. In her book by the same name,

⁴⁵ Gerard Manley Hopkins, “God’s Grandeur,” *Poetry Foundation*, March 23, 2015, <http://poetryfoundation.org/poem/173660>.

⁴⁶ Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000) 1.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

McFague describes her work as “an attempt to look at everything through one lens, the model of the universe or the world as God’s body.”⁴⁹ In doing so, the author intimately relates the created world to God’s immanent presence among us, as the principle of sacramentality presumes. McFague proposes that the entire creation is the image of God rather than the traditionally accepted understanding that this image extends only to *man*. For McFague, The purpose of using this imagery “is to cause us to see differently, to think and act as if bodies matter and to change what we value.”⁵⁰ Celia Deanne Drummond proposes that seeing God in this way allows for new vision that dispels the limited anthropocentric view of God and restores the blessedness of the earth God intended through God’s act of creating. Deanne-Drummond says, “instead of viewing the earth through an arrogant eye, as if it were a machine that we then seek to control, we need to pay attention to the earth, come in tune with that earth, and become conscious of its vibrant subjectivity.”⁵¹ Declaring that the Earth has *subjectivity* abandons the mechanistic approach to creation that fosters a utilitarian abuse that degrades earth’s integrity. When non-human creation is appreciated as subject it maintains its own dignity distinct from its service to humankind; all creation, therefore, is embodiment of the divine presence and sacramental.

These Protestant theologians, along with numerous others, speak for the principle of sacramentality as they argue for treatment of the earth as an embodiment of God with humanity. So too, Catholicism has long honored the sacramental nature of the created world. Appreciating the whole of creation through sacramental eyes casts a spiritual light on all that we observe. An intimate understanding of the sacred meaning of a sacramental

⁴⁹ Sallie McFague, *The Body of God: An Ecological Theology* (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1993) vii.

⁵⁰ Ibid.

⁵¹ Celia Deanne Drummond, *Eco-Theology* (Winona, MN: Saint Mary’s Press, 2008) 151.

used in baptism opens the door to movement of this meaning into space beyond the church doors. As people accept that the natural world participates in divine blessing, sacramental symbols will speak to us of sacredness wherever we encounter them, making it possible to treat them with respect and due care. A spirituality of learning from sacramentals carries sacred meaning from ritual celebration into daily practice. On the other hand, a crisis of spirituality occurs when the Earth's resources are used to their destruction as if they could constantly replenish themselves.

Prominent Catholic theologians in the twentieth century stressed the principle of sacramentality as critical to Catholic identity. Richard McBrien asserts that "the principle of sacramentality constitutes one of the central theological characteristics of Catholicism."⁵² When the depth of its meaning is appreciated, the natural world becomes a source of divine revelation, a blossoming of the beauty and grace God planted, and a cherished gift that must be protected and respected. This is why theologian John Baldwin proposes that:

The best of our Catholic tradition has always shown an immense respect for and appreciation of the goodness of God's creation. Put simply, we don't believe that it's necessary to flee the world and created things to encounter God. On the contrary, because of the goodness of creation and especially because God chose to commit him irrevocably to humankind and our created world in the Incarnation, we believe that God encounters us through what He has made. Put another way,

⁵² Richard P. McBrien, *HarperCollins Encyclopedia of Catholicism*, (New York: Harper Collins, 1995) 1148.

God doesn't communicate His life to us despite our created, physical, human condition but precisely in the midst of it.⁵³

Thomas H. Groome, one of Catholicism's primary religious educators, agrees with McBrien and Baldwin, validating the primacy of the principle of sacramentality but also stressing the symbiotic relationship between God, humans, and the natural world sacramentality fosters. He writes,

Catholic tradition gathers up this conviction that our covenant is realized through the ordinary of life in the principle of sacramentality. Nothing is more significant to *what makes us Catholic* than the sacramental principle. It epitomizes a Catholic outlook on life in the world; if allowed only one word to describe Catholic imagination, we'd have to say *sacramental*. The sacramental principle means that *God is present to humankind and we respond to God's grace through the ordinary and everyday of life in the world*. In other words, God's Spirit and humankind work together through nature and creation.⁵⁴

Sacramentality is the vision that sees the reflection of all the Earth's water in the baptismal font, water that flows in our oceans, lakes, and rivers, water that lays deep underground trying to survive pollution, and water that pours from faucets to clean and refresh us. The Catholic sacramental worldview is the foundation for my assertion that it is meaningful to envision the water of baptism as symbolic of the Earth's water.

⁵³ John F. Baldwin, "Catholics: A Sacramental People" (Boston: Boston College, C21 Resources Spring, 2012) 2.

⁵⁴ Thomas Groome, *What Makes Us Catholic: The Sacramental Principle* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 2002) 84.

Sacraments and Symbol

A discussion regarding the relationship between the waters of baptism and the Earth's waters necessarily includes an understanding of the meaning of sacrament and the impact of symbol, and whether extending the sacramental symbols diminishes or distorts that meaning. Although this project will not provide an extensive examination of the historical transitions of the definition and practice of Baptism,⁵⁵ it will highlight the most significant movements as they relate to my theological and ecological concerns

Historical Development of the Sacrament

The definition and understanding of sacrament has undergone sometimes dramatic shifts throughout Church history. Although the most commonly understood definition of Baptism is “an outward sign instituted by Christ to give grace”⁵⁶ suggesting a direct link between sacramental practice and Jesus, Martos argues that “historically speaking, however, we have to admit that there is no direct evidence that Jesus of Nazareth left his companions with a well-defined and complete set of sacramental rituals such as those that later developed in the Church.”⁵⁷ However, the first followers of Jesus were rooted in a Jewish tradition that remembered their covenant with God whose sacred mystery was revealed through word and deed. Sacrament, for them, was inherent in their history and sacred writings and practiced in the religious rituals that emanated from their experience of Jesus, providing oneness with the risen Lord. Martos identifies this phase of the Christian experience as “*communal sacramentality* because it was common to all the small and scattered Christian communities that were appearing around the Roman Empire, and

⁵⁵ For a detailed historical development see Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in The Catholic Church* (Liguori, MO: Liguori/Triumph, 2001).

⁵⁶ “The Baltimore Catechism,” *CatholiCity: The Catholic Church Simplified*, revised edition, 1941, Question 136, <http://www.catholicity.com/baltimore-catechism.html>.

⁵⁷ Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church* (Liguori, MO: Liguori/Triumph, 2001) 19.

because it began to form a focus for the communal life of those churches.”⁵⁸ Readers are given a glimpse into the communal sacramentality of the early Christians through their sacred writings but much is unknown about this relatively small number of those who followed the teachings of Jesus. This was a burgeoning community of believers in Jesus Christ that would soon grow to great numbers beyond the Roman Empire. Martos continues, “Greek-speaking Christians some time later began to speak of their sacramental rituals as ‘mysteries’ apparently borrowing the term from the pagan mysteries, but in Paul’s letters *mysterion* always had the more everyday meaning of something which is hidden or secret.”⁵⁹ The first Christians’ notion of *sacramentum* was a seedling for later growth in the Church’s sacramental theology that gave rise to the definition of sacraments instituted by Christ. As the church grew and took root beyond Jerusalem and Palestine *sacramentum* became synonymous with the Church’s rite of initiation which included Baptism, Confirmation, and Eucharist. Martos explains that “what occurred in the first few centuries of writings about the Christian sacraments, then, was a gradual movement away from the metaphorical descriptions of experienced realities to philosophical explanations of spiritual realities,”⁶⁰ or the transition from the Hebrew to the Greek experience of God. The first three centuries proved to be relatively calm compared to the theological and philosophical arguments that came later.

Controversy over the effects of baptism arose in the fourth century causing a fissure among disagreeing members of the Church Hierarchy. Augustine entered into this controversy in the fifth century, attempting to bring resolution to the century-long

⁵⁸ Joseph Martos, *The Sacraments: An Interdisciplinary and Interactive Study* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009) 111.

⁵⁹ Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church* (Liguori, MO: Liguori/Triumph, 2001) 25.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 44.

theological problem. Augustine, one of the most influential Church doctors, offered a broader definition of sacrament that supported the early Christian sense of mystery but captured the evolution of the term. Martos offers his sense of Augustine's definition of sacrament when Martos writes "he defined *sacramentum* as 'a sign of a sacred reality' and he noted that according to this general definition anything in the world could be considered a sacrament since all of creation was a sign of God."⁶¹ Paradoxically, Augustine also introduced the theology of original sin; every human person was tainted at conception necessitating an action after birth to remove the stain to reach salvation.

Monika Hellwig comments on the meaning of sacrament practiced by the followers of Jesus after his ascension, "in the New Testament the apostolic community makes it quite clear that entrance to the community is by baptism into the death and resurrection of Jesus."⁶² The early Christians understood well the effect of sin on their desire to live as followers of Jesus and that baptism allowed them to lead radically different lives. But for them, Hellwig argues, "the meaning that this baptism expressed was their acceptance of the message that they had heard, and their unity with the death and resurrection of Christ through whom they had died to their sinful ways, and were reborn into a new life."⁶³ Baptism provides the opportunity to become a member of a community of people who experienced salvation in the present moment, a salvation that brought about a new way of living. Paul instructs the followers in Rome that baptism allows them "to walk in newness of life."⁶⁴ But with the introduction of original sin into the theological conversation the

⁶¹ Ibid., 4.

⁶² Monika Hellwig, *The Meaning of the Sacraments* (Dayton, OH: Pflaum Press, 1981) 9.

⁶³ Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church* (Liguori, MO: Liguori/Triumph, 2001) 25.

⁶⁴ *The Holy Bible: Catholic Study Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011) Romans 6:4.

primary effect of baptism shifted from initiation into a community of faith to salvation from sin.

Although Augustine opened the door to an appreciation of the sacramental nature of the world the church lost sight of this theology as concerns over original sin dominated the conversation. Martos explains, “later generations came to understand sacramental practices primarily as signs of unseen metaphysical realities such as changes in one’s soul or in one’s spiritual relation to God and other Christians.”⁶⁵ This is vastly different from first century Christians’ experience of Baptism transforming their lives so that they could spread the message of Jesus in the present moment. By the early Middle Ages the meaning and practice of baptism had succumbed to the Greek influence which, Martos explains, resulted in “gradual movement away from metaphorical descriptions of experienced realities to philosophical explanations of spiritual realities.”⁶⁶

The Middle Ages were a time of great turmoil in the Church, affecting its sacramental life. Following centuries of confusion, disagreement, and revisions the definition for sacrament that emerged was very different from the one proposed by Augustine centuries earlier, even though Thomas Aquinas’ definition – an effective sign that causes to happen what it symbolizes- was open-ended and allowed for interpretations that respected the fullness of sacramental life. Martos offers an understanding of this historical period when he writes,

By the Thirteenth century the meaning of *sacramentum* had become much more restricted and the word was used only to refer to the ecclesiastical rites listed by the Second Council of Lyons. The medieval period was a crucial one for the Catholic

⁶⁵ Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church* (Liguori, MO: Liguori/Triumph, 2001) 57.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 44.

sacraments... Their rituals became more standardized, their religious meanings became more solidified, and the theological explanations for them became more unified.⁶⁷

Following the influence of Thomas Aquinas, the theological understanding, the form, and the language that was accepted by the universal Church during the Middle Ages determined sacramental practice for hundreds of years, well into the twentieth century. The number of sacraments was limited to seven, the sacramental character was explained metaphysically as the transformation of a person's soul, and the effect was the seal of the sacrament. The Church revisited these determinations during the Second Vatican Council in the Twentieth Century.

In 1962, when Pope John XXIII was asked why he was convening the Second Vatican Council, he explained he wanted to throw open the windows of the Church and let the fresh air of the spirit blow through. Perhaps Pope John could not anticipate the gust of wind that would enter through that window shaking the Church walls for many years, and perhaps he could not fathom the transformation of Church practice that would follow. He, nevertheless, understood fully the need to reconnect the Church to the world. His Church *in* the world vision became very evident in the opening words of the Vatican Council II document the *Pastoral Constitution On The Church In Modern World (Gaudium et Spes)* – “the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the people of our time, especially of those who are poor or afflicted, are the joys and hopes, the grief and anguish of the followers of Christ as well.”⁶⁸ This sense of solidarity between the Church and the world moved the two

⁶⁷ Ibid., 47.

⁶⁸ *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations*, edited by Austin Flannery (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing Company, 1996), 163.

thousand four hundred fifty churchmen who participated to explore every dimension of Church life in respect to its relationship to the faithful as well as those outside the Church.

The Constitution on the Sacred liturgy (Sacrosanctum Concilium) includes a consideration of the meaning of the Church's sacramental life. It was determined that "with the passage of time, however, certain features have crept into the rites of the sacraments and sacramental which have made their nature and purpose less clear to the people of today."⁶⁹ The lack of clarity and purpose the document speaks to engendered revisions of the rite for infant baptism that are evident today. In the new rite of Baptism⁷⁰ of a child the parents are addressed at the beginning of the celebration, a sign of recognition of their primary role in their child's faith formation. This role is again emphasized within the *renunciation of Sin* as it is the parents and godparents who respond to the litany of questions posed by the presider to confirm the recognition of their responsibility to foster the child's faith life. The prayer of the faithful follows the scripture reading bringing the community into full participation within the ritual. Each action is then clearly explained as the child is anointed with oil and water: "we pray for this child: set him (her) free from original sin, make him (her) a temple of your glory, and send your Holy Spirit to dwell with him (her)." Before pouring or immersing the child in water, the presider explains that "God uses the sacrament of water to give his divine life to those who believe in him. Let *us* turn to him, and ask him to pour his gift of life from this font on this child he has chosen," indicating, again, the importance of the community of believers. The blessing of the mother and father at the end of the rite is the final indication of the nature and purpose of the

⁶⁹ Ibid., 139.

⁷⁰ *Rite of Baptism of a Child*, English translation, (Milwaukee, WI: International Committee on English in the Liturgy, Inc. 1969) 7.

sacrament – to initiate this child into a community that will nurture and support her (his) faith life as a follower of Jesus Christ with parents as the ultimate role models.

Impact on Catechesis

In the new *Rite of Baptism of a Child*, an important change referred to the significant role of parents and godparents – “the roles of parents and godparents, and also their duties, should be brought out more clearly in the rite itself.”⁷¹ The Church more explicitly recognized the significant influence of parents on the faith life of their child, eventually leading to the espousal that parents are their child’s first and primary religion teachers. If this is to be honored due consideration must be given to the experience parents are afforded as they prepare to baptize a child. The church has a responsibility to engage parents in a way that allows them to integrate their life experience, their family relationships, and their spiritual understanding of the sacrament so that the sacramental event becomes more clear and purposeful. Included in the new *Rite of Baptism of a Child*, parents’ and godparents’ responsibility to “bring him (her) up in the practice of the faith to see that the divine life which God gives him (her) is kept safe from the poison of sin, to grow always stronger in his (her) heart.”⁷² acknowledges the immense role they play in their child’s spiritual life. Is it, then, reasonable to allow them time and attention to consider the fullness of meaning inherent in the symbolism of the water that is indispensable to the sacrament? One of the questions that surfaces in this regard is the relationship of the water in the baptism font to the earth’s natural water sources. Might baptism preparation make room for a consideration of the relationship between the water that is essential for the sacrament and the water that is critical for the planet’s survival? The

⁷¹ Ibid., 9.

⁷² Ibid.

re-formation of parent preparation considers this relationship an essential dimension for both the meaning of the sacrament and the integrity of the Earth's water.

Chapter Two: Practical Theology and Methodology

Historically, practical theology or *praxis* was a disparaged field, as if it was separate and distinct from systematic theology—the accepted gold standard among theologians. Don Browning explains that “the field of practical theology has been throughout its history the most beleaguered and despised of the theological disciplines.”⁷³ I will not attempt to define practical theology because I agree with Terry Veling’s analysis that “it resists a certain branding or labeling and makes it appeal to a more integrated theological sensibility that attempts to honor the great learnings of theological wisdom with the desire for God and the coming of God’s kingdom ‘on earth as it is in heaven.’”⁷⁴ Attempting to define practical theology exposes one to a conundrum that exists within the current academic theological community. Separating practical theology from classical theology suggests a dualism in which each claims superiority. At risk is increased attention to the individual merits of each rather than a greater appreciation of the contribution the whole theological conversation makes to the world.

Bernard Lee describes practical theology as “a mutually critical conversation between interpretations of our faith and interpretations of our personal and social situation(s), that elicits strategies which promote the reign of God.”⁷⁵ Veling speaks to the inherent purpose of practical theology when he says, “the work of practical theology is *vocational* work, in which our purpose for being in the world is related to the purposes of God.”⁷⁶ Veling proposes that “practical theology, as its name suggests, is less a thing to be

⁷³ Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology*, (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 3.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 3-4.

⁷⁵ Bernard J. Lee, “Historical Memories and Historical Guesses” January 27, 2015, <http://www.marianist.com/files/2012/07/Eightieth-Reflections.pdf>. 17.

⁷⁶ Terry Veling, *Practical Theology “On Earth As It Is In Heaven”* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005) 12.

defined than it is an activity to be done.”⁷⁷ In this regard, therefore, rather than proceed from a precise definition to the way practical theology is evident in religious experience, I will focus on what it means to *do theology* within the context of the concerns my project addresses. How might people approach the concerns over the deterioration of Earth’s water as they honor the sacramental water and the theology of baptism?

Practical theology, in its re-conceptualized understanding was reborn in the twentieth century as theologians reflected on theology’s efforts to read and interpret the signs of the times in light of the Gospel so that the Church might more fully engage the world.⁷⁸ The renewal the Second Vatican Council initiated encouraged a dialogic exchange between the Church and the world with a view to becoming partners in addressing the suffering within contemporary cultures. Veling identifies practical theology’s starting point as “a concern, a question, an experience, an issue, and event – something, at least, that claims attention. So one of the first things we can say about practical theology is that it is a theology *generated by* concern.”⁷⁹ Theologians responded –each with a nuanced expression- to practical theology’s expectation to begin with the present moment, understand the culture that gives rise to it, view it through the lens of the Gospel, and determine a pastoral response. As Don Browning says, “theology can be practical if we bring practical concerns to it from the beginning.”⁸⁰ The process is dynamic in that it is revisited as new events and concerns arise. Again, Veling proposes practical theology is a process of ‘doing’ – not in the sense of another task to be performed, rather being

⁷⁷ Ibid., 4.

⁷⁸ *Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World*, December 7, 1965, http://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_cons_1.

⁷⁹ Terry Veling, *Practical Theology “On Earth As It Is In Heaven”* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005) 217.

⁸⁰ Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991) 5.

about the “work of God,” of which Jesus says, “My Father is working still, and I am working (John 5:17). Jesus does the work his Father gave him to do (John 17:4), to bring good news to the poor, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and to the blind new sight, to set the downtrodden free, to proclaim the Lord’s year of favor (Lk 4:18).⁸¹The work theology attends to in contemporary culture arises from the scriptures exhortation to be about the work that responds to the needs of those most ignored and deprived of human freedom. The gospel further recognizes the needs of the earth by insisting upon a proclamation of the “Lord’s year of favor.” The Book of Exodus commands a sabbatical year every seven years; “for six years you shall sow your land and gather in its yield; but the seventh year you shall let it rest, and lie fallow so that the poor of your people may eat; and what they leave the wild animals may eat. You shall do the same with your vineyard, and with your olive orchard.”⁸² Letting the land lay fallow allows the earth to rejuvenate so that it might, again, provide abundance for harvest. The year of favor benefits the beleaguered people and wildlife who have not enjoyed the land’s harvest for six years but now have an opportunity to take what it produces without fear of reprisal, and allows the land to rest from its work so that it might become whole and nourished. God knew that both needed care and protection. Likewise, the work of practical theology gives voice to all in creation who suffer at the hands of those who would abuse freedom and dignity – whether human or non-human.

Feminist theologian Rebecca Chopp gives attention to the work of practical theology when she says, “for countless numbers of women and men engaged in feminist practices of theological education, theology is about ‘saving work’, the emancipatory

⁸¹ Terry Velting, *Practical Theology “On Earth As It Is In Heaven”* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005) 12.

⁸² *The Holy Bible: Catholic Study Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011) Exodus 23:10-11.

praxis of God and of Christian community in the world.”⁸³ Since practical theology begins with experience, Chopp values theological praxis as an opening for women’s voices to be heard. She states “theology is a practice, not merely a theory of abstraction, analysis, or explanation, at least in terms of how women and men participate in feminist practices of theological education.”⁸⁴ Chopp acknowledges theology has been for too long about existential knowledge but recognizes that when theology begins with experience the knowledge gained may transform *existence* allowing for “envisioning new possibilities for the social order, for relationships, for one’s own life, and for the earth.”⁸⁵ Chopp parallels saving work done on behalf of the earth with that exercised to allow humanity to reach its full potential; the *saving work* of which Chopp speaks is accomplished for all God has created.

The paradigm of saving work is extended with the political practical theology of German theologian Johannes Baptiste Metz. His theology is political in the sense that it is concerned with society as a whole; not the workings of government institutions. Metz examines cultural movements and social structures in light of the gospel to assess the Church’s involvement in the suffering of those who have been denied the freedom offered in the gospels. His political theology insists upon a practical foundation from which theory emerges rather than the reverse process. Metz explains:

The unusual and to many rather unsettling phrase “practical fundamental theology” is intended to make it clear that theory and praxis are not seen here in their usual linear relationship, according to which praxis means carrying out, applying, or

⁸³ Rebecca Chopp, *Saving Work: Feminist Practices of Theological Education* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995) 77.

⁸⁴Ibid., 5.

⁸⁵Ibid., 78.

concretizing a theory that has already been formulated. A practical fundamental theology opposes the undialectical subordination of praxis to theory and ideas. It insists on the intelligible force of praxis itself, understood in terms of a “theory-praxis” dialectic. In this respect it does theology under the “primacy of praxis.”⁸⁶

Therefore, Metz considers it fundamental to theology to listen to the experiences of those who suffer; their suffering recalls the memory of the suffering Messiah. Although Metz is primarily concerned with *human* suffering and does not address in a detailed way the degradation of the natural world, his political practical theology identifies the relationship between human and natural suffering. Metz suggests:

The teleological confidence in a growing reconciliation between human beings and nature has been shattered, and now that it is past we are noticing for the first time how deeply and lastingly it has formed us-right down to our philosophical and theological interpretations of the future... We are coming to an even clearer consciousness of the dangers and antagonisms that arise when technological and economic processes are left to their own autonomous laws and when political navigation systems break down: dying cities, ravaged ecologies, unchecked exploitation of resources.⁸⁷

Metz argues that the technological-economic *progress* that is the hallmark of the twenty-first century world, left unchecked, threatens the very freedom it was meant to create.

Rebecca Chopp affirms Metz’ practical fundamental theology as she describes his theology as “an attempt, within the paradigm of liberation theology, to formulate the conditions of possibility for the human subject, Christianity, and theology through the

⁸⁶ Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward A Practical Fundamental Theology* (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2013) 61.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 97-98.

memory of suffering.”⁸⁸ It is this memory – the *dangerous memory* of the suffering of Jesus Christ – that propels Metz to develop a theology that addresses human suffering. According to Metz, remembering Jesus’ suffering shocks us into a profound awareness of the reality of human suffering. This kind of memory, he says, “interrupts the evolutionary and narrative-less logic of ‘the way things are’ to reveal new and dangerous insights for the present...that illuminate for a few moments and with a harsh and steady light the questionable nature of things we have apparently come to terms with.”⁸⁹ This *dangerous memory*, therefore, challenges us to do the saving work the suffering, death, and resurrection of Jesus demands. Edward Farley draws these conclusions from Metz’ political theology:

In this view practical theology is not a theology of the Church’s realization in the world but a theology of human and world transformation. As a post-Marxist critical orientation, it calls for social criticism of the church itself and its function in society. In this approach the realities of contemporary political and social life are the focal point of practical theology.⁹⁰

Practical theology is an enterprise that, Veling says, “wants to keep our relationship with the world open, so that we are never quite ‘done’ with things; rather, always undoing and redoing them, so that we can keep the ‘doing’ happening, passionate, keen, expectant – never satisfied, never quite finished.”⁹¹ From this perspective practical theology is a dynamic process that continually adjusts to the signs of the times while maintaining a

⁸⁸ Rebecca Chopp, *The Praxis of Suffering: An Interpretation of Liberation and Political Theologies* (Eugene, OR: Wipf and Stock, 2007) 64.

⁸⁹ Johannes Baptiste Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a Fundamental Practical Theology*. (New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 2013) 171.

⁹⁰ Edward Farley, *Practicing Gospel: Unconventional Thoughts on the Church’s Ministry* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2003) 33.

⁹¹ Terry Veling, *Practical Theology: “On Earth as It Is in Heaven”* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005) 7.

committed stance to the justice and compassion of the Word of God. This is a challenging task, to respect human experience as an expression of the Word in the present, revealing God's purpose in the here and now and, at the same time, interpret those experiences, in Veling's words, "in the light of the kingdom of heaven."⁹² Thomas Groome suggests this happens when the reign of God in our world is recognized as

*an unfolding story... one great Christian Story that continues to unfold and is far from over... For now, we can view our lives in the world and the whole affair of human history as a divine-human partnership or covenant. God is ever present, reaching out in love to humankind and empowering us to respond as partners in realizing God's best intentions for ourselves and creation.*⁹³

Human experience is rich with layers of the Story of God alive among us, constantly making known God's truth; these layers unfold as people of faith share their sense of God working in the concrete situations of their lives. The power of the human response to God's invitation or urging exists most profoundly when we are willing to share our faith stories as sacred events - moments when our seemingly individual experience becomes a truth that speaks of God's intention for God's reign in the world. Practical theology honors experience as one of the ways God continues to tell the *Story* of salvation. Robert Kinast argues "in this sense practical theology is not an occasional, problem-solving technique but an ongoing way of doing theology and living the Christian faith."⁹⁴ The central questions, then, for practical theology become what are the people saying about God's movement in the world and how are they partnering with God to reveal God's intentions for all creation.

⁹² Ibid., 18.

⁹³ Thomas Groome, *What makes Us Catholic: Eight Gifts for Life* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 2002) 20-21.

⁹⁴ Robert L. Kinast, *What Are They Saying About Theological Reflection?* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 2000) 52.

Method Matters

The saving work of practical theology is rooted in the Gospel, connected to the culture and expressed within the tradition. As the Whiteheads suggest the partners in the ongoing conversation to determine how best to carry out this work are “the experience of the community of faith, the Christian tradition, and the resources of the culture.”⁹⁵ The process of reflecting on these three dialogic partners reveals the ways each contributes to the work of lifting up the world to God. They write, “a complex and changing world challenges us to discern the continuing presence and action of God and to respond, faithfully and effectively, to this presence.”⁹⁶ Such discernment awakens us to realities regarding our own humanity and the needs of the world in which we live. Each of these provides important information for reflection in reaching a ministerial decision.

In *Method in Ministry* James and Evelyn Whitehead describe “a method of reflection: a systematic way to approach the various sources of religious information, one that leads not just to theoretical insight, but to pastoral decision.”⁹⁷ This reflection depends on a three-stage process: attending, assertion, and pastoral response. Attending attempts to seek “out the information on a particular pastoral concern that is available in personal experience, Christian tradition, and cultural resources.”⁹⁸ These are equally important contributors to the conversation so judgment regarding the quality of the information gained is suspended until the end of the process. The conversation brings “the perspectives gathered from these three sources into a lively dialogue of mutual clarification to expand

⁹⁵ James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1995), 6.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, x.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 13.

and enrich religious insight.”⁹⁹ This is a very challenging step in the process, requiring a willingness to share while remaining open to difference and new insights. As practical theologian Don Browning says, “to think and act practically in fresh and innovative ways may be the most complex thing that humans ever attempt.”¹⁰⁰ This may be particularly true as it relates to theology since, often, people’s perspectives are deeply rooted.

The Whiteheads describe the assertion stage as a crucible since it becomes an occasion during which insights are questioned and tested for authenticity. They recognize that “a faith community at this stage struggles with the tensions generated by the diversity it has uncovered. Frequently confusion and anxiety result – both for individuals and for the group...Struggling to sustain the assertive stance of *faith seeking understanding*, a group may feel off-balance.”¹⁰¹ The final step of the process is the decision to do the saving work that is necessary. They argue that “discerning how to respond; planning what to do; and evaluating how we have done”¹⁰² is the ministerial response that will enrich personal, cultural, and theological experience. And they believe that “a goal of Christian ministry is the formation of reflective communities alive to the presence of God”¹⁰³ in the world, in all of creation, in ways that engender commitment to a pastoral response which leads to transformation.

In this work I engage the Whitehead method as I attend to a multitude of voices within the Christian tradition, contemporary culture, and the lived experience of mothers who participated in a focus group which addressed the questions regarding their children’s

⁹⁹ Ibid.,

¹⁰⁰ Don S. Browning, *A Fundamental Practical Theology: Descriptive and Strategic Proposals* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1991), 7.

¹⁰¹ James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological reflection and Christian Ministry* (Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward, 1995) 76.

¹⁰² Ibid., 13.

¹⁰³ Ibid., 17.

baptisms. The process of attending, asserting and pastoral response is particularly suited to accommodate the theological reflection that enlightens my efforts to engage these partners in a conversation addressing the relationship between water in the baptismal ritual and the concern over water pollution and scarcity. Chapter Three gives attention to culture's respect for the environment as well as concern for its degradation, particularly as it relates to the earth's water resources. Chapter Four listens to the Christian tradition's development of the sacrament of baptism both from the perspective of hierarchy and the people of God. Chapter Five makes room for women to share their reflections on the meaning of Baptism for their families as well as their sense of the relationship that may exist between baptismal water and the Earth's water resources. Since experience is vital to practical theology, the insights these women offer are critical to determine the validity of my conclusions as I move forward to pastoral planning regarding the possibility of re-forming baptismal preparation to focus on the holiness of *all* water. This methodology is consistent with practical theology which, as Terry Veling suggests, "is seeking to reclaim—a certain reintegration of theology into the weave and fabric of human living, in which theology becomes a 'practice' or a way of life."¹⁰⁴ My hope is that addressing the sacrament of Baptism with a view to its relationship to ecological concerns for the earth's water will move toward a way of life that recognizes both the gift inherent within the sacrament as well as the holiness of all of our water sources.

The Role of Imagination in Practical Theology

Partnering with God to bring about God's reign is uniquely dependent on human imagination rather than logic or reasoning. It is as George Bernard Shaw has Joan describe in his play *Saint Joan*. In a conversation with Robert Joan says "I hear voices telling me

¹⁰⁴ Terry Veling, *Practical Theology "On Earth As It Is In Heaven"* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005) 3.

what to do.” Attempting to discredit Joan, Robert replies “they come from your imagination.” Joan quickly responds, “of course. That is how the messages of God come to us.”¹⁰⁵ Imagination is the human capacity which allows God’s intentions to be communicated to persons so that the human person may know how to live with God. Groome notes, “We recognize that revelation comes to meet us first in our imaginations; we reach through the ordinary to the “extraordinary” present in it by the impetus and power of imagination.”¹⁰⁶ The human person is capable of a multitude of imaginings, both destructive and constructive. It is only in partnership with God that our imaginations move us to see and aspire to cooperation with the divine in bringing about the reign of God in the world. Fischer suggests imagination is “the bridge which joins God and the earth...the human power that opens us to possibility and promise.”¹⁰⁷ Unlike Robert, practical theology does not discount the integrity of the imagination to disclose God’s revelation; rather, it relies upon this gift, evident within human experience, to continue to tell the Story.

Theological Reflection: Imagination in Pursuit of God’s Purpose

Accessing God’s Story through human experience is a complex process that demands committed attention to the revelation imagination unveils. This process is guided by theological reflection which the Whiteheads describe as “a systematic way to approach the various sources of religious information, one that leads not just to theoretical insight, but to pastoral decision.”¹⁰⁸ The sources of religious information are influenced by time

¹⁰⁵ George Bernard Shaw, “Saint Joan” May 10, 2015, <https://ebooks.adelaide.edu.au>.

¹⁰⁶ Thomas H. Groome, *Sharing Faith: A Comprehensive Approach to Religious Education and Pastoral Ministry* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 1991) 197.

¹⁰⁷ Kathleen R. Fischer, *The Inner Rainbow: The Imagination in Christian Life* (New York: Paulist Press, 1983) 7.

¹⁰⁸ James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry* (Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward, 1995) x.

and place which heightens the complexity of discerning God's Story within the human story. There exists a corollary between reading the signs of the times and imagining God's voice announcing divine presence and action that makes every time and place an opportunity to understand revelation, an occasion to turn the page in the Story. As Veling explains,

to read the signs of the times is one of the most difficult theological tasks, yet it is a theological imperative. Too often we do not behold the announcement of God in our present reality. Rather, we cling to what we already know of God, to tired and weary theological frameworks that have lost their sense of timeliness, to religious truths that lull us to sleep rather than provoke us to wakefulness.¹⁰⁹

The dynamism inherent in an authentic reading of the signs of the times will not allow for acceptance of the status quo when the intention is discovering the reign of God in the present. However, this is dependent on a willingness to suspend expectations in favor of attentiveness to new understanding of God's presence within all creation.

Every understanding the human person has of God and the world has been interpreted through a lens that views these in ways limited by the time, space, and circumstances of personal experience. Robert Kinast explains "there is no such thing as purely objective knowledge, free of all human interpretation. Every sensory perception is an interpretation of what's really there. Whatever an event may be in itself, its meaning is constituted by the interpretations it generates."¹¹⁰ What Don Browning suggests regarding the necessary role interpretation plays is as true for the person of faith as it is for the practical theologian. Browning says, "the practical theologian never has access to either the

¹⁰⁹ Terry Veling, *Practical Theology: "On Earth as It Is in Heaven"* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005) 17.

¹¹⁰ Robert L. Kinast, *Let Ministry Teach: A Guide to Theological reflection* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996) 124-125.

raw, uninterpreted Christian fact or the unbiased and uninterpreted reality of ordinary experience.”¹¹¹ Persons of faith who engage in theological reflection place themselves in circumstances that acknowledge unknowing while seeking to understand the world in which we live and act according to new awareness. Veling says, “all this is to say we live in the world as interpreters of the world, that we are always interpreting ourselves and the world around us, that to be human is to be an interpreter of life in all its rich distinctions and variations.”¹¹² The process of interpreting the world around us begins at birth as the newborn tries to focus on the faces of those who offer care and continues throughout life as each person *sees* their world with the distinctions and variations as if looking through a kaleidoscope. Theological reflection engages these beautiful – although fragmented – visions in conversation in order to see the image of God at the center. Patricia O’Connell Killen and John deBeer describe the effort as seeking God’s presence when they write,

Seeking God’s presence involves theological reflection, the artful discipline of putting our experience into conversation with the heritage of the Christian tradition. In this conversation we can be surprised and transformed by new angles of vision on our experience and acquire a deepened understanding and appreciation of our tradition. In this conversation we can find ourselves called to act in new courageous and compassionate ways.¹¹³

New understanding is not enough; transformation that leads to action is the ultimate goal of theological reflection. The reign of God in the world only comes about when those who seek to understand God’s presence pursue actions that are both faithful to the gospel and

¹¹¹ Don Browning, “Practical Theology and Religious Education,” in *Formation and Reflection: The Promise of Practical Theology*, edited by Lewis S. Mudge and James Poling (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1987) 80.

¹¹² Terry Veling, *Practical Theology: “On Earth as It Is in Heaven”* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005) 23.

¹¹³ Patricia O’Connell Killen and John De Beer, *The Art of Theological Reflection* (New York: Crossroad, 2003) 2-3.

responsive to the needs of the present. Theological reflection depends upon a model that supports these goals by including the diverse conversation partners who will expand the horizon so that the expansive vision of God may be appreciated. The Whiteheads propose a model that partners experience, tradition, and culture in conversation with a view to looking at the big picture of the world these diverse sources of information offer.

The Whitehead Model

A model for theological reflection makes room for the voices that contribute to the awareness of God's presence; the conversation partners in the Whitehead model are personal experience, Christian tradition, and cultural resources.¹¹⁴ Each of these sources contributes indispensable insights into the ways the gospel message may be best recognized and practiced in a multicultural world. This is particularly challenging in the twenty-first century. As the Whiteheads explain, "while theological reflection in ministry is not new, its contemporary context is complex. Influenced by the explosion of information and the expansion of historical consciousness that mark this century, ministers (and all people of faith) are more keenly aware of the limits of their own knowledge."¹¹⁵ This awareness is both a challenge and a gift as the recognition of limitations prompts deeper reflection and conversation to discover God with us within the complexity. Therefore, all three sources unveil a dimension of God's activity in the world that is not available to any one source alone. The conversation allows each to speak as messengers of the divine Word.

The Conversation

Although the conversation partners each speak their own truth, they only remain faithful to the gospel when they are able to integrate their individual message into the

¹¹⁴ James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry* (Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward, 1995) ix.

¹¹⁵ Ibid.

bigger Story God is telling. Killen and De Beer argue “relating to our own experience, our culture, our faith communities, and our Christian heritage in a way that allows for genuine conversation leading to wisdom connects us deeply and creatively to God’s presence and purposes for us.”¹¹⁶ Deep listening is key to the process. Veling explains that “the priority of good conversation is with the question or issue-at-hand that can only arise as both (or all) partners earnestly seek it and listen for it, letting it emerge such that it leads the way and makes an answer or a new understanding possible...it is the subject matter that must lead the conversation.”¹¹⁷ In Christian theological reflection the subject matter emerges as questions arise regarding God’s saving work in this particular time and place – What might God be saying here and now. Experience, tradition, and culture respond to the question, listen to one another, and “*come to an understanding together.*”¹¹⁸ In this process each of these is transformed, moving forward to action with new insights.

The Voice of Tradition

The long history of Christian tradition includes, as Veling notes, a “massive range of insight and grace.”¹¹⁹ It is not simply and easily understood, nor is it a static set of beliefs and responses handed down from one age to the next. Tradition only lives when it can be heard speaking in multiple languages and moving among vast arrays of people in every time and place. As Tevye in *Fiddler on the Roof* yearns for the good old days when each member of the family acts according to firmly established principles, he knows that the traditions he embraced are moving in ways he did not think possible.¹²⁰ Religious

¹¹⁶ Patricia O’Connell Killen and John De Beer, *The Art of Theological Reflection* (New York: Crossroad, 2003) 3.

¹¹⁷ Terry Veling, *Practical Theology “On Earth as It Is in Heaven”* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005) 61.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 6

¹²⁰ Joseph Stein, *Fiddler on the Roof* (New York: Limelight Editions, 1964).

traditions are like this – they are grounded in a love for the Christian family but adapt as that family changes and grows. Veling calls tradition a gift. He writes,

The gift of tradition, however, is not something we admire and the place in a glass display case, or enshrine in a museum as an artifact of the past. Nor less is it a possession – something “we” own, something that belongs “to us”...In speaking of religious tradition as a gift we must not be lulled into thinking that it is given to us so that we can now “own” or “possess” it. Rather it is given to be given, not to be owned.¹²¹

It is when tradition is given as gift rather than possessed that it takes on the character of a gracious handing-on from one generation to the next; a gift that is beloved by both the giver and receiver because it is wrapped in the values of the past, present, and future.

Veling explains,

Tradition is the collective and living memory of a people, but what they remember is not a “glorious past” to be revered and enshrined. Rather they remember a time that has not yet arrived... Tradition carries the seeds of the future, because a truly living memory is also a living hope born of yearning and expectation. Indeed the past survives and endures precisely because it leans into the future, precisely because it carries the promise of what could be, what is still coming.¹²²

Living tradition demands that humans, like Tevye, let go of the desire to hold on to a reality that only remembers the past, and allow for the timelessness of the divine reality that brings together past and future into the present. Tradition is lived in every time and place as the

¹²¹ Terry Veling, *Practical Theology “On Earth as It Is in Heaven”* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005) 34-35.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 37.

past and present intermingle in order to gain a deeper sense of How God has been and continues to be active within the world around us.

Killen and De Beer caution against adopting a standpoint of certitude regarding religious tradition. This approach sees “the unfamiliar only in terms of what we already believe. From certitude we can tolerate only that which fits our predetermined categories.”¹²³ This disposition is the enemy of authentic conversation because it eliminates acceptance of information not previously considered. A position of certitude demands “if some aspect of the new landscape is too difficult to fit into the picture we wish to see, we bulldoze it until we are satisfied that the world is as we know it to be,”¹²⁴ ending any possibility of recognizing the new revelation God intends to share or any movement toward new insights God is making available through dialogue. The standpoint of certitude accepts the Story God wishes to share as static rather than one that is *unfolding* and *far from over* as Thomas Groome suggests.

Again, balancing the past and the present is critical to making space for tradition within the theological conversation. Veling explains that

Attention to the past is of great interest to the practical theologian. It would be wrong to assume that practical theology is only concerned with making theology relevant to contemporary situations. Rather, it is deeply rooted in a living, breathing tradition that binds people across centuries. To simply bypass this living tradition in the hope of arriving at a more applicable, relevant, or contemporary rendering of that tradition would be a grave mistake.¹²⁵

¹²³ Patricia O’Connell Killen and John De Beer, *The Art of Theological Reflection* (New York: Crossroad, 2003) 4.

¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, 4.

¹²⁵ Terry Veling, *Practical Theology “On Earth as It Is in Heaven”* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005) 29.

Living tradition bridges the past and the present allowing for movement that both reaches back to grasp the revelation that formed the Christian way of life and extends its arms forward to embrace the wisdom of contemporary reality. How might this happen? Killen and De Beer maintain that “if we want to encounter the wisdom of our Christian heritage in a way that offers transformative insights, we must bring that heritage into our reflection from a standpoint of exploration. In this standpoint we know that coming to understand both our religious heritage and our own experience is a lifelong process of the journey of faith.”¹²⁶ The journey begins with the roots of the Christian tradition and explores how it has grown and changed throughout the centuries. Exploring the tradition in this way allows for discoveries that might remain hidden were it not for the imaginative people of faith who seek to know the fullness of God’s revelation. As the Whiteheads explain, “the conversation that is Christian tradition brings to pastoral reflection the Judeo-Christian memory of God’s saving presence among us.”¹²⁷ Christians look for that saving presence within the culture that surrounds them, confident that God is as present today as God was at any other time in human history.

The Voice of Culture

Just as experience and tradition are not isolated dimensions of theological conversation, but rather interdependent partners in dialogue so too culture is linked with them as people of faith attempt to read the signs of the times. The reciprocal interaction between the three conversation partners expands the horizons of each creating a panoramic view of divine presence in the world. Although the Whiteheads identify experience,

¹²⁶ Patricia O’Connell Killen and John De Beer, *The Art of Theological Reflection* (New York: Crossroad, 2003) 50.

¹²⁷ James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry* (Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward, 1995) 23.

tradition and culture as three *poles* in the model for theological reflection, these are not to be considered autonomous independent components that do not intersect. If that were true meaningful conversation that engages the gifts each brings would not be possible. In fact, the Whiteheads explain that “distinguishing these three components runs the risk of implying that each pole of the model is actually discrete and disconnected from the others. The truth of the matter is otherwise; *theological reflection* names an ongoing process of both mutual construction and mutual critique.”¹²⁸ As previously noted, experience and tradition are shared from the standpoint of exploration rather than certitude so that each may be open to the transformation new insights promise. The same is true for culture; pastoral theologian Michael Cowan notes that “the Christian community of faith will sometimes affirm the workings of its surrounding culture and society; sometimes it will confront them.”¹²⁹ Only through an exploration of cultural influences within contemporary society, an approach which allows for both affirmation and confrontation, will the voice of culture contribute to an appreciation of divine presence. The Whiteheads argue that “the cultural pole of the model strengthens pastoral reflection in three ways...(it) alerts us to culture’s role in shaping human experience, (it) acknowledges the mutual critique of tradition and culture, and (it) encourages the community of faith to actively engage cultural information and resources in its mission and ministry.”¹³⁰ Culture, in this regard, includes the contributions of anthropology, psychology, sociology, economics and the other social sciences that might offer insights into the phenomenon of human existence. When the findings of these sciences are considered in theological conversation the notion of the

¹²⁸ Ibid., 55.

¹²⁹ Michael Cowan, *The Social-Cultural Context of Ministry* (New Orleans: Loyola Institute for Ministry, 1995) 22.

¹³⁰ James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry* (Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward, 1995) 55.

church separate from and antagonistic to the world is dispelled in favor of the mutually cooperative relationship between the church and the world.

The Second Vatican Council recognized the interdependent relationship between the church and the world when it addressed the way humans interact with their culture. *The Pastoral Constitution notes that* “it is a fact bearing on the very person of man that he can come to an authentic and full humanity only through culture, that is, through the cultivation of natural goods and values. Wherever human life is involved, therefore, nature and culture are intimately connected.”¹³¹ Human persons cannot live separate from their culture; culture influences the choices, beliefs, and world-view which determine the way each person behaves. But “culture” is not monolithic; its pluralistic nature deepens the complexity of the theological conversation. As Veling points out, “it is not an easy task to bring theological and cultural reflection together. Those of us who have ever lived in a different culture-encountering a different language, symbols, customs, beliefs- will surely appreciate the fine intricacies of the human cultural web.”¹³² Therefore, culture is many voices speaking in countless ways about the Divine purpose for human persons and for the flourishing of all God has created.

The Voice of Experience

As an independent phenomenon, interpretation of experience is fluid in that persons, time, and events affect our understanding, requiring a reentry into the experience as a new event. Killen and DeBeer suggest honesty prompts exploring the experience once a new awareness emerges. They write “if we describe something that has happened to us, describe it honestly, we reenter the situation and re-experience the thoughts, feelings, and

¹³¹ *Vatican Council II Constitutions Decrees Declarations*, edited by Austin Flannery, “The Pastoral Constitution on the Church in the Modern World” (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing, 1996) 229.

¹³² Terry Veling, *Practical Theology “On Earth as It Is in Heaven”* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005)165.

physical sensations that were part of it. The more deeply we plumb the situation again, the more vulnerable we become because our exploration exposes our cherished beliefs and interpretative frameworks to critique and revisions.”¹³³ The process of theological reflection asks us to honestly expose our experience to the circumstances inherent in the conversation giving up “the rationalizations and self-justifications that we carry as armor.”¹³⁴ David Tracy says this is “a journey of intensification – a journey which most of us fear yet desire, shun yet demand.”¹³⁵ All who honestly participate in theological reflection make this journey in anticipation of arriving at a destination not yet foreseen, the place where God awaits to reveal a new appreciation of divine presence. Due consideration needs to be given to the way personal experiences are described. The one who relates the experience is already imbedded in its meaning but the listeners have little or no prior understanding. Therefore, in order to draw the listeners into the experience they need a factual description that provides information necessary to understand the details. Kinast says, “a factual description provides basic information about a person’s experience so that others are able to reconstruct the event more or less as it occurred. This is important because theological reflection begins with concrete experiences and seeks their theological meaning.”¹³⁶ The one who shares the experience may be heavily invested in its meaning so that the facts seem less important than the emotional significance, but the conversation partners will not be able to appreciate the experience unless they are given the factual information that explains the event. Kinast explains “although the description is factual, it

¹³³ Patricia O’Connell Killen and John De Beer, *The Art of Theological Reflection* (New York: Crossroad, 2003) 76.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, 77.

¹³⁵ David Tracy *The Analogical Imagination: Christian Theology and the Culture of Pluralism* (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 126.

¹³⁶ Robert L. Kinast, *Let Ministry Teach: A Guide to Theological reflection* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1996) 24.

is not impersonal. The goal is not to present an event “objectively” as if the presenter were not part of it. This is neither possible nor desirable. Therefore the presenter’s feelings, reactions, and thoughts should be included as part of the description.”¹³⁷ The presenter seeks to achieve a balance that considers the needs of the listeners and an honest and personal sharing of the event.

Therefore, experience, shared openly and honestly in a conversation with tradition and culture, leads down a path that ends with a deeper awareness of God’s purpose and answers to the questions that prompted reflection and conversation. The Whiteheads offer an explanation of experience as an essential conversation partner –

We identify the experience of individual Christians and the collective experience of faith communities as voices essential to the conversation. In fact, most pastoral reflection begins here, triggered by the hopes and confusions of our own lives. And life experience does more than provoke us to reflect; the wisdom carried in our personal and communal histories illumines the reflection as well. These histories are themselves profoundly influenced by both Christian faith and the surrounding culture. Nevertheless, *experience* merits explicit consideration in pastoral reflection.¹³⁸

Including experience in the conversation exploring the meaning of divine presence within the world is not merely an incidental action to ingratiate the wider community; it is essential to gain the wisdom necessary for a response to God’s purpose for creation. In fact, the Whiteheads propose that experience “instigates the conversation... Starting a reflection in experience seems obvious, but this voice has not always been heard in the theological

¹³⁷ Ibid., 25.

¹³⁸ James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry* (Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward, 1995) 5.

conversation.”¹³⁹ They caution that beginning with biblical texts or church teachings “frequently fails to come to terms with experience”¹⁴⁰ without which authentic revelation is diminished. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* asserts the indispensable nature of experience in discerning revelation when it points out “all the faithful share in understanding and handing on revealed truth. They have received the anointing of the Holy Spirit, who instructs them and guides them into all truth.”¹⁴¹ The truth experience brings to the theological conversation speaks to the way God has moved within the community of faith to allow the gospel message to be heard and lived. The faithful draw upon their religious traditions to inform them in order to make the message real within their contemporary experience of faith. This is necessary for a religious heritage to continue to grow and adapt to changing circumstances. As the Whiteheads explain, “a religious heritage only survives by being engaged and embraced in each new generation.”¹⁴² The voice of experience provides the new energy necessary for a consistent renewal of tradition so that it may maintain its promise of fidelity to the Word of God active in every age.

This dissertation seeks to hear the voices of women’s experience in particular, as they have been muffled for much of history and have, historically, been discounted in theology’s pursuit of truth that reveals God’s purpose for all God has created. Women’s voices are certainly valuable to discerning God’s word. For this reason, hearing women express their own reality of divine presence in their lives is the focus of the voice of experience for this work.

¹³⁹ Ibid., 9.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid.

¹⁴¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1994) 28.

¹⁴² James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry* (Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward, 1995) 5.

The Voices of Women in Experience, Culture and Tradition

Women's words about the Divine are not univocal as women's ways of knowing and sharing understanding are expressed as diversely as any other segment of society. Unfortunately, women's voices have been devalued, as Mary Field Belenky notes, because of "the commonly accepted stereotype of women's thinking as emotional, intuitive, and personalized...particularly in Western technologically oriented cultures, which value rationalism and objectivity. It is generally assumed that intuitive knowledge is more primitive, therefore less valuable, than so-called objective modes of knowing."¹⁴³ As previously discussed, all knowing reflects interpreted understanding which is rooted in personal experience and, therefore, never totally objective. Intuitive knowing is a process of listening carefully to experience to discern truth that is meaningful personally and, perhaps, more generally understood than previously perceived. Such knowing taps into the human imagination revealing deeply held beliefs and values that connect human persons to divine reality. This process is not a solitary moment of reflection but rather one that makes room for learning that happens in relationship. Belenky explains a breakthrough insight they gained in their interviews with women, "women don't just learn in classrooms; they learn in relationships."¹⁴⁴ The interactions women have day to day are the soil for a growing knowledge that changes the landscape of their lives making new understanding possible.

The process of relational learning, characteristic of women's ways of knowing, leads to reflection that motivates not only one's worldview but also actions on behalf of self and others. As Belenky says, "in order for reflection to occur the oral and written forms

¹⁴³ Mary Field Belenky, et al, *Women's Ways of Knowing: The Development of Self, Voice and Mind* (New York: Basic Books, 1997) 6.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, xi.

of language must pass back and forth between persons who both speak and listen or read and write- sharing, expanding, and reflecting on each other's experiences. Such interchanges lead to ways of knowing that enable individuals to enter into the social and intellectual life of their community."¹⁴⁵ This is the possibility inherent in women's ways of knowing and the voices that are heard when women share the meaning of their experiences.

Psychologist Carol Gilligan supports the power of voice to impact personal and communal life. Gilligan identifies the inherent relationship between being human and the function of speaking and being heard as she writes,

To have a voice is to be human. To have something to say is to be a person. But speaking depends on listening and being heard; it is an intensely relational act... This ongoing relational exchange among people is mediated through language and culture, diversity and plurality. For these reasons, voice is a new key for understanding the psychological, social, and cultural order.¹⁴⁶

When women's voices are heard, reality is not limited to his-story; experience broadens to include her-story as evidence of the complex plurality of the nature of the human story. God's Story is best revealed when all members of the human family are encouraged to speak and are heard with appropriate deference to the truths their experiences reveal.

Patriarchy's Suppression of Women's Voices

Encouragement to speak the truth of experience has not always been afforded to women. Elizabeth Johnson portends that

a genuinely new development is occurring around the world, namely, the rise of women's voices. It is a sign of the times that women, marginalized for millennia

¹⁴⁵ Ibid., 26.

¹⁴⁶ Carol Gilligan, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998) xvi.

in male-dominated cultures, are becoming increasingly conscious of their human worth and, in the prophetic words of Pope John XXIII, “will not tolerate being treated as inanimate objects or mere instruments, but claim, both in domestic and in public life the rights and duties that befit a human person.”¹⁴⁷

These rights and duties include having the courage to speak about their life experiences with a confidence that in so doing they are contributing to the growth and well-being of all God has created. Women’s awareness that their voices have been either silent or masked by male interpretations for too long has led to the courage to move beyond the shadows so that they might be seen and heard telling their own stories.

Mary Catherine Hilbert argues that even though they have been banned from ordination in the Catholic Church, they still speak with authority in the Christian community. She explains “the source of this authority is the Spirit of God, ultimately the only source of authority for the church.”¹⁴⁸ Hilbert identifies the ways women are gifted with the authority of the Spirit. First “through their vocation as baptized persons, which makes them into prophets, priests, and leaders as part of the body of Christ”¹⁴⁹ women receive the power to speak on behalf of the divine reality they experience. Next, “their actual experience of living the Christian life every day gives them a growing wisdom in discerning the truth in love”¹⁵⁰ Women’s process of discernment is done in concert with others as they seek to grow from not only their own experiences but those of all who influence their lives. Finally, Hilbert proposes that women’s “negative experiences of

¹⁴⁷ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2003) 6.

¹⁴⁸ Mary Catherine Hilbert, *Speaking With Authority: Catherine of Siena and the Voices of Authority Today* (New York: Paulist Press, 2001) 28.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

suffering engenders knowledge of what should not be,”¹⁵¹ allowing for the powerful witness to all who suffer suppression and the denial of their full humanity. The truth that women share emanates from the baptized life and flourishes within the lived Christian life that refuses to accept that the divine authority of the Holy Spirit they received is subservient to the male-dominated culture. Women throughout the world are gaining the confidence to reject the patriarchal worldview and are telling their stories as subjects rather than objects of the events they experience. Miriam Therese Winter says that “women are particularly encouraged to critique the (patriarchal) narratives in light of their own experience, applying what Elisabeth Schussler Fiorenza calls a hermeneutics of suspicion, questioning the facts in light of feelings, filling in the missing pieces by imaginatively recreating herstory from a woman’s point of view.”¹⁵² History, both socially and theologically, undergoes dramatic paradigm shifts when herstory is spoken and integrated into previously accepted interpretations of events. For truth to be authentically captured experience, tradition, and culture will make room for the woman’s point of view.

Carol Christ proposes that “we seek to speak a truth rooted in our experience, our time and place, our bodies. We can affirm the relativity of all universal truth claims, because we know that all truth claims are rooted in time and space, in our experience and body. And there is no experience or body that is not perspectival.”¹⁵³ The point of view is critical to storytelling; therefore, who tells the story is central to its meaning. As Christ says,

¹⁵¹ Ibid.

¹⁵² Miriam Therese Winter, *WomanWord: A Feminist Lectionary and Psalter* (New York: Crossroad, 2000) xii.

¹⁵³ Carol P. Christ, “Embodied Thinking: Reflections on Feminist Theological Method.” *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* (1989) 8.

the simple act of telling a woman's story from a woman's point of view is a revolutionary act. The revolution that occurs transforms a seemingly objective truth into the nuanced perspective that is gained from the embodied storytelling. We can affirm the relativity of all universal truth claims, because we know that all truth claims are rooted in time and space, in our experience and body. And there is no experience or body that is not perspectival.”¹⁵⁴

Joan Chittister describes this as “a revolution of the heart”¹⁵⁵ Speaking about women’s voices, Chittister says, “there is another world out there waiting to be heard, and they are not going to wait any longer for permission to speak their own truths.”¹⁵⁶ Imposed silence was confronted and rejected as women took responsibility for their own stories; the revolutions began. Chittister says,

the revolutions that come silently, come first in the heart, come with the force of steel because they come with no force at Revolutions of this magnitude do not overturn a system and then shape it. They reshape thought, and then the system overturns without the firing of a single canon. Revolutions such as this dismantle walls people thought would never fall because no wall, whatever its size, can contain a people whose minds have long ago scaled and vaulted and surrounded it.¹⁵⁷

The force that demolished the systematic structure which denied women their right to speak was women’s belief in themselves and the value of their experiences. It was women speaking to other women affirming the power of one another’s voices. It was women

¹⁵⁴ Ibid., 8.

¹⁵⁵ Joan D. Chittister, *Heart of Flesh: A feminist Spirituality for Women and Men* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1998) 171.

¹⁵⁶ Ibid., 171.

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 172.

awakening to the gift of their humanity; a gift that was given to them so that it might be shared. It was women realizing God's presence in their bodies and spirits and committing to expressing the truth God has shared with them. These are the women who shared their experiences of faith as they participated in focus groups so that this work might reflect a feminist methodology that listens to their words and integrates their insights into a pastoral response that grows out of this dissertation experience.

A Feminist Methodology

Elizabeth Johnson explains that “feminist theology engages in at least three interrelated tasks: it critically analyzes inherited oppressions, searches for alternative wisdom and suppressed history, and risks new interpretations of the tradition in conversation with women’s lives.”¹⁵⁸ Engaging women in conversation with tradition and culture, hearing their experience as a valid source of God’s revelation supports the feminist methodology that seeks a new interpretation of ritual symbols and a transformation of the theological paradigm that frames beliefs and practices. As Johnson says, “feminist liberation theology hopes so to change unjust structures and distorted symbol systems that a new community in church and society becomes possible, a liberating community of all women and men characterized by mutuality with each other and harmony with the earth.”¹⁵⁹ Feminist methodology pursues liberation from distorted designs of personhood for all persons- women and men – and hopes for a system that allows all human persons to develop fully as God intends.

Feminist methodology is grounded in women’s experiences. Theologian Gloria Schaab understands this process similar to looking through a kaleidoscope as she notes,

¹⁵⁸ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1996) 29.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 31.

in feminist theology the theoretical subject of method is a relatively recent enterprise. Because of the multiplicity of approaches, the variety of sources, and the complexity of norms, a viable schema is needed to consider the pluriformity and particularity of the mystery of God and the God-world relationship in dialogue with the unity and diversity of women's experiences. A kaleidoscopic model may prove responsive to the challenge of feminist theology and applicable to the broader enterprise.¹⁶⁰

The beauty of this metaphor is that just as a kaleidoscope can contain many and varied images at the same time, feminist methodology does not attempt to synthesize women's experiences into a uniform expression of belief; rather it attends to the plurality of the voices as they speak to one another. At times, synthesis happens naturally when the women confirm one another's views. However, this is not a prerequisite for the truth of their sharing, for dissimilarity is as vital to the process as agreement. The most important criteria are that the issues being discussed and the questions asked around those concerns are directed towards an honest exploration of divine revelation.

Gloria Schaab explains that "the history of feminist theological methodology reveals that it is precisely the problems being addressed and the questions being asked that have determined the methods of feminist theological investigation."¹⁶¹ An authentic feminist methodology places the problem for discussion in the center of the circle of women who view it from the particular stance of their experience. The women are invited to explore, and confront the issues and concerns in order to reflect on their own experience and imagine a response that expresses truth about who they are and how they relate to the

¹⁶⁰ Gloria L. Schaab, "Feminist Theological Methodology: Toward a Kaleidoscopic Model" *Theological Studies* 62 (2001) 341.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*

world around them and the God who is present to them. Therefore, consistent with this design, five women who baptized their children within the past six years were invited to gather to share their insights related to the concerns of this dissertation; what is the meaning of Baptism, how is God present in the water of Baptism, and does God's presence extend to all the earth's water. It is important to note, at this point, I appreciate that the fathers' reflections are certainly meaningful to discussion of these questions, but the feminist methodology I am using privileges women's voices. I am hopeful that, in the future, a conversation with the children's fathers might shed even greater light on the relationship between Baptism and the Earth's water.

The conversation with the women is not intended to be a qualitative or ethnographic study, nor does it produce findings that are applicable beyond the immediate boundaries of the study, as is the case in qualitative research. The similarities to an ethnographic study exist in the up-close and personal nature of the conversation and the close observation of the participants, but these interviews are intended to be conversation between women who have experience with the concerns addressed in this work. They are, however, not merely casual conversation; in fact the women's experiences are vital to the assertions and pastoral response that emerges from their insights. Chapter Five records these insights, looking forward to integrating them into the full conversation between tradition, culture, and experience.

Chapter Three

The Water Phenomenon

Water

The Water understands

Civilization well;

It wets my foot, but prettily

It chills my life, but wittily

It is not disconcerted,

It is not broken-hearted:

Well used, it decketh joy,

Adorneth, doubleth joy:

Ill-used, it will destroy,

In perfect time and measure

With a face of golden pleasure

Elegantly destroy.¹⁶²

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Well-used it decketh joy! Poetry, art, religion, literature, and science all profess the marvels of water. The joy of which Emerson speaks has been expressed in all the ways in which humans communicate with and encounter water in the world around them. It returns each time humans “live in the eternal now,”¹⁶³ listening with hearts, not just heads. Eckhart says, “God is creating the entire universe, fully and totally, in this present *now*.”¹⁶⁴ Seeing

¹⁶² Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Water,” *Poetry Foundation*, April, 25, 2015, www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/184637.

¹⁶³ Matthew Fox, *Meditations with Meister Eckhart* (Rochester, VT: Bear and Co., 1983) 7.

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

water with hearts as a new creation each time people experience it – whether in the oceans, rivers, and lakes, or in baptism fonts - refreshes our bodies and spirits as they awaken once again to the joy it evokes. Matthew Fox calls this experience *Dreamtime* – “all the stories of original creation are Dreamtime; It is all *now*.”¹⁶⁵ Water is a remarkable example of the eternal now – constantly renewing itself within the hydrological cycle that is described in chapter one. The process of water renewal is reflective of this *Dreamtime* during which God’s words are heard over and over again: “let the waters under the sky be gathered together in one place;”¹⁶⁶ water continuously gathers, rises, flows, and gathers anew to sustain all that lives. This is evidenced in Thomas Berry’s description of the magnificence of water’s ability to perform. He writes,

A fantastic engineering feat. To draw water up out of the seas, to lift it over the continents, to pour it down over the countryside, the valleys, to nourish the trees, then gather it into the streams, to nourish the life there and then to flow back to the sea, with nutrients for sea life- it is all a vast engineering, biological, and chemical enterprise.¹⁶⁷

Water joy is the experience of appreciating the consequence of this *feat* each time we encounter water; each time we are refreshed and renewed by its power. When water is well-used, rather than abused, it functions as God intended – to be the source of life for all creation.

Emerson expressed grave concerns over the treatment of water in the nineteenth century, with a warning that humans should take seriously regarding their water usage,

¹⁶⁵ Matthew Fox, *Creation Spirituality and the Dreamtime* (Newstown, New South Wales: Millennium Books, 1991) 12.

¹⁶⁶ *The Holy Bible: Catholic Study Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011) Genesis 1:9.

¹⁶⁷ Thomas Berry, *Befriending the Earth: A Theology of Reconciliation between Humans and the Earth* (Mystic, CN: Twenty-Third Publications, 1992) 99.

since “ill-used it will destroy” them. Two centuries later poets, environmentalists, and scientists are issuing the same cautions. This chapter looks closely at the water crisis to discover how contemporary culture assesses and responds to its awareness of earth’s diminishing and contaminated water supply. Historically, experts and authorities have both allowed water abuse and fought to preserve its integrity; humans are at a moment in history when it is imperative that they acknowledge the damage we have done and respond with renewed awareness to restore water to its original integrity.

Water Scarcity

Since water is a universal concern, no region, country, municipality or corporation has unfettered access to it as awareness and advocacy regarding fresh water has gone global. Coalitions have sprung up around the world and include transnational institutions like UN-water and water justice advocacy organizations like Blue Planet Project. One of these organizations – Food and Water Watch – points out, “anyone with an internet connection and a concern about fresh water can aggregate and process information, congregate and strategize.”¹⁶⁸ The motivation of organizations and individuals throughout the world to keep eyes on water stems from the increasing concerns over the earth’s water supply. Water.org names the water crisis as “the #1 global risk based on impact to society,”¹⁶⁹ offering astounding statistics supporting the critique that, globally, the scarcity of fresh water is critical. The statistics demonstrating the human impact of this diminishing water supply will be discussed in part three of this chapter. What is the water message twenty first century culture is attempting to convey? Experts in the field look at three areas of concern to address this question: the quantity of available water and the practices that

¹⁶⁸ “Public Water for All,” *Food and Water Watch*, March 17, 2015, foodandwaterwatch.org/campaign/public-water-all.

¹⁶⁹ “Water Facts and Sanitation Facts” *water.org*, March 17, 2015, Water.org/water-crisis/water-facts/water.

impact the supply, the quality of the water that is accessible, and the human impact when both of these are degraded.

As noted, water scarcity is a global concern; therefore, many cultural sources give voice to a crisis that requires immediate attention if our water supply is going to be sufficient to support all life. This concern is as official as the United Nations and as home-grown as the recent Occupy movement, the international branch of the Occupy Wall Street movement that protests against economic and social inequality around the world. In 2013 the Secretary General of the United Nations Ban Ki Moon warned:

About a half of the global population could be facing water shortages by 2030 when demand would exceed water supply by 40 percent. We must use what we have more equitably and wisely. *By 2030 nearly half the global population could be facing water scarcity.*¹⁷⁰

At times insufficient fresh water access is the result of financial problems that lead to the disruption of water service. Such was the case in Detroit, Michigan. In 2014 the U.S. Occupy Movement addressed the crisis Detroit families faced when their water was turned off:

Right now in Detroit, Michigan – which sits next to the Great lakes containing the largest body of freshwater on Earth, and 84% of North America’s freshwater supply – nearly half of all Detroiters, or approximately 300,000 people, are having their access to running water shut off or threatened.¹⁷¹

¹⁷⁰ Ban Ki-moon, “Budapest Water Summit,” March 18, 2015, <http://un.org/apps/news/infocus/sgspeech>, 2013.

¹⁷¹ Halima Cassells “Detroit Water Crisis Escalates, and UN Declares Violation of Human Rights,” *Occupy.com*, June 26, 2014, <http://www.occupy.com/author/halima-cassells>.

Although the first of these sources represents the worldwide community and the second a small sector of that community, they are speaking with one voice regarding the urgency to respond to the lack of access to clean drinking water for all human persons.

From droughts to damming, from waste disposal to fracking, the availability of water for human consumption is diminishing. California is facing the state's record-breaking drought for the third straight year:

Vanishing lakes and rivers, lost agricultural jobs, fallowed farmland, rising water bills, suburban yards gone brown. But nowhere is the situation as dire as in East Porterville, a small rural community in Tulare County where life's daily routines have been completely upended by the drying of wells and, in turn, the disappearance of tap water.¹⁷²

In 2014 the U.S. Department of Agriculture issued a report estimating that more than thirty seven million people in California suffer from drought conditions.¹⁷³ The water shortage is so critical in California that on April 1, 2015 the Governor mandated a twenty-five percent reduction in water for all residents. However, diminishing water supply is not only prevalent in California; it affects states across the nation. Darryl Fears, writing for the *Washington Post* warns, "a long and severe drought in the U.S, Southwest pales in comparison with what's coming: a 'megadrought' that will grip that region and the central Plains later this century, and probably stay there for decades, a recent study says."¹⁷⁴

Equally disturbing, in the Fall of 2012 *Earthjustice* reported that "by next year, thirty six states are expected to have water shortages. Western rivers, and even some in the east, are

¹⁷² Jennifer Medina, "With Dry Taps and Toilets, California Drought Turns Desperate," *NY Times*, October 2, 2014, http://newyorktimes.com/2014/10/03/us/california-drought-tulare-county.html?_r=0.

¹⁷³ "California Drought: Farm and Food Impacts," *United States Department of Agriculture*, March 18, 2015, <http://www.ers.usda.gov/topics/in-the-news/california-drought-farm-and-food-impacts.aspx>.

¹⁷⁴ Darryl Fears, "A Megadrought Will Grip U.S. in the Coming Decades, NASA Researchers say," *Washington Post*, February 12, 2015, <http://washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/today>.

overdrawn.”¹⁷⁵ A prominent environmentalist, Jay Famiglietti, writing for *National Geographic*, assesses that “it is no longer in our power to end the global water crisis – it has progressed too far. We can make a difference by managing our way through it to sustainability with the cooperation of governments and private enterprise.”¹⁷⁶ It is vital that these partners need also look to the religious community and individuals to effect change, since the water shortage has become an epidemic. As the Declaration of the Mission to Washington, developed by 150 religious heads and scientists in 1992, states, “we believe that science and religion, working together, have an essential contribution to make toward any significant mitigation and resolution of the world environmental crisis.”¹⁷⁷ Religious beliefs regarding Baptism, and the science of the water crisis is an opportunity to bring together religion and science in a meaningful with a view to a greater appreciation of each. Therefore, this work first addresses the degradation of the earth’s water resources followed by an historical, sacramental, and practical assessment of Baptism. It is helpful, at this point, to consider the actions that have contributed to the deterioration of our water supply, looking toward to the remedies that move humanity toward sustainability.

How Much Is Enough?

Annie Dillard writes about the time she spent on the shores in the Roanoke Valley, and the pleasure she experienced watching the flowing water. She notes,

It has always been a happy thought to me that the creek runs all night, new every minute, whether I wish it or know it or care, as a closed book on a shelf continues to whisper to itself its own inexhaustible tale. So many things have been shown so to

¹⁷⁵ Trip Van Noppen, “Abused, Overused, Running Out...” *Earthjustice Quarterly Magazine*, Fall (2012) 4.

¹⁷⁶ Jay Famiglietti, “Can We End the Global Water Crisis,” *National Geographic*, June, 2013, <http://voices.nationalgeographic.com/2013/06/10/can-we-end-the-global-water-crisis/>.

¹⁷⁷ “Joint Appeal by Religion and Science for the Environment” in *This Sacred Earth* edited by Roger S. Gottlieb (New York: Routledge, 2004) 736.

me on these banks, so much light has illumined me by reflection here where the water comes down, that I can hardly believe that this grace never flags, that the pouring from ever-renewable sources is endless, impartial and free.¹⁷⁸

Would that, today, people could sit on the banks of a creek, as Annie Dillard did in 1974, and trust that the water that flows is ever-renewable. As Dillard contemplated this marvelous sight in Virginia's Roanoke Valley, she was inspired by the beauty and constant presence of flowing water. Thankfully, there are still places people can go that offer this same experience and evoke a similar grateful response. However, some forty years later those creeks, rivers, and streams are drying up as a result human practices that interfere with the natural process water needs to replenish them. In this section I will consider these practices and their impact on the quantity of water available to all forms of life on earth.

Drought

The National Weather Service reports that although drought is “a normal recurrent feature of climate that occurs in virtually all climate zones, from very wet to very dry, those that last for extended periods of time cause severe damage to earth’s water resources.”¹⁷⁹ The long-term deficiency in precipitation results in water shortage “causing adverse impacts on vegetation, animals, and/or people. Human factors, such as water demand and water management, can exacerbate the impact that drought has on a region.”¹⁸⁰ There are various types of drought but, for my purposes, the focus will be on hydrological drought that “occurs when water reserves in aquifers, lakes, and reservoirs fall below an

¹⁷⁸ Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1999) 35.

¹⁷⁹ “Drought Public Fact Sheet,” *National Weather Service*, August 2006, <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/om/brochures/climate/Drought.pdf>.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

established statistical average. Hydrological drought can happen even during times of average or above average precipitation, if human demand for water is high and increased usage has lowered the water reserves.”¹⁸¹ The impact on the water supply extends beyond the drought-affected region, since the water supplies of many regions are inter-connected.

As seen, California is an area of the United States particularly prone to drought conditions. The availability of water continues to be threatened by both the drying up of surface water as well as the increasing effect this is having on groundwater and reservoirs. In January of this year the governor of California declared a drought state of emergency. The water shortage is so critical in California that on April 1, 2015 the Governor mandated a twenty-five percent reduction in water for all residents; this is an increase over the twenty percent reduction previously mandated since that restriction did not provide the anticipated benefits. The situation has become so critical that, recently, the Los Angeles Times reported “California has about one year of water left.”¹⁸² Since surface water is very limited during drought, efforts to replace this water with reserves create dire consequences. Pumping groundwater is one such practice that depletes water stored for long-term use. In the Times op-ed Jay Famiglietti points out:

Statewide we’ve been dropping more than twelve million acre-feet of total water yearly since 2011. Two-thirds of these losses are attributable to groundwater for agricultural irrigation in the Central Valley. Farmers have little choice but to pump more groundwater during droughts, especially when their surface water

¹⁸¹ Larry West, “What is drought?,” *About News*, March 17, 2015, <http://environment.about.com/od/environmentalevents/a/whatisdrought/htm>.

¹⁸² Jay Famiglietti, “How Much Water Does California Have Left?,” *LA Times*, March 6, 2015, www.latimes.com/opinion/op-ed/la-oe-famiglietti-southern-california-20140709-st.

allocations have been slashed 80% to 100%. But these pumping rates are excessive and unsustainable. Wells are running dry.¹⁸³

California is caught up in a vicious cycle of water depletion; inadequate surface water due to drought conditions puts greater pressure on groundwater and aquifers, but excessive access to these reserves endangers future availability of water necessary for sustainability. Famiglietti proposes solutions including mandatory water rationing and early implementation of the *Sustainable Groundwater Management Act*, warning that the present schedule, allowing nearly twenty years for implementation, risks the possibility of “having no groundwater left to sustain.”¹⁸⁴ Pressing for major changes in policy, Famiglietti calls on “the public to take ownership of this issue. This crisis belongs to all of us – not to just a handful of decision-makers. Water is our most important and commonly owned resource, but the public remains detached from discussions and decisions.”¹⁸⁵ It may be that the general public – including religious leaders and congregations – have accepted that the water crisis is best left to the science and environmental experts, and that they have little to offer to move toward better practices for water management, but since water is so vital to all life everyone has a vested interest in steps taken to secure water resources for the present and the future.

This is not only a California story; it can be repeated for every region in the world that suffers from drought conditions. The California mirror reflects Florida suffering from drought conditions for years beginning in 1998. The year 2000 was the driest in its history, says Florida environmentalist Cynthia Barnett. Barnett describes that year as “the worst in a four-year drought. Nearly one million acres of wildfires burned throughout the

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

state... Yawning sinkholes opened in yards, in the middle of highways. Thousands of private wells went dry. Lake beds turned to sand, sprouting ten foot tall weeds.”¹⁸⁶ Just as in California, Florida’s groundwater supply was affected by excessive pumping and continues to suffer today. Barnett continues, “the drought and its aftermath represented a turning point in the politics of water in Florida. developers had spent 150 years desperately trying to drain the state and get rid of water. Now they were desperate to find it.”¹⁸⁷ Florida’s history was marked by numerous attempts to drain the vast acres of wetlands to make it habitable; many of these succeeded. Barnett comments that a one hundred mile stretch of this marshland, named The Everglades, was a “jungle of wildlife – the only place in the world home to both crocodiles and alligators. It became the last major sanctuary in the Eastern United States for egrets and herons.”¹⁸⁸ But when politicians, lawyers, and developers looked at this marvelous wildlife home they saw only swampland that must be drained to make way for human habitation. One such lawyer, Buckingham Smith, looking at the marshes said, “A solitary inducement cannot now be offered to a decent white man to settle in the interior of the Everglades...it is suitable only as the haunt of noxious vermin, or the resort of pestilent reptiles.”¹⁸⁹ Thus, in the 19th century, efforts were underway to drain the marshland and make it available to developers, railroad construction, and for sale to anyone who wanted to profit from its destruction. Florida’s population boomed! One hundred years later, following droughts, the digging of canals, the construction of dams, and other water-eliminating practices officials were desperately looking for ways to restore Florida’s water. That process continues today.

¹⁸⁶ Cynthia Barnett, *Mirage: Florida and the Vanishing Water of the Eastern U.S.* (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan, 2007) 36.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 103.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, 15.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

Look, again, in the mirror and see Kansas and Oklahoma where, as Vandana Shiva observes, the “worst drought of the century in the United States hit in 1996, destroying millions of acres of wheat. The United States wheat reserves dropped to their lowest level in fifty years.”¹⁹⁰ These are only a few areas in the United States that have been and continue to be devastated by drought; this story is told many times throughout the world with similar effects on the people and the economies. Therefore, it is in the world’s best interests to understand the nature of drought and the visible and invisible consequences of this weather pattern. Every region in the world is vulnerable to the social economic, and environmental impacts of drought. The National Weather Service reports:

the over 100-year weather record of the U.S. indicates that there were three or four major drought events during that period. Two of these, the 1930’s Dust Bowl drought and the 1950’s drought, each lasted five to seven years and covered large areas of the continental U.S. Droughts are among the most costly weather-related events, in terms of economics and loss of life.¹⁹¹

The world is in the midst of drought conditions – mandatory water restrictions so lawns turn brown, people are cautioned to use less water while bathing, people feel the dryness in the air – but they are less likely to know about the damaging effects to their long-term water supply; groundwater is severely depleted during drought leaving the Earth high and dry long after drought has subsided. Beyond the terrors resulting from drought people, then, face continuing depletion of earth’s groundwater they depend on for survival.

Therefore, it is vital that people question the reason for drought and steps to address and resolve the issue.

¹⁹⁰ Vandana Shiva, *Water Wars: Privatization, Pollution, and Profit* (Boston, MA: South End, 2002), 49

¹⁹¹ “Drought Public Fact Sheet,” *National Weather Service*, August 2006, <http://www.nws.noaa.gov/om/brochures/climate/Drought.pdf>.

Climate Change

Although the debate continues regarding climate change, reputable scientists and concerned religious leaders alike identify the devastating effect of this phenomenon on water. The National Academy of Sciences, in a 2012 report to the pentagon warns that “the security establishment is going to have to start planning for natural disasters, sea-level rise, drought, epidemics, and other consequences of climate change.”¹⁹² It is expected that dry places and drought-prone regions will become even drier as the climate warms causing a decrease in the fresh water supply. Less fresh water exacerbates drought conditions putting greater stress on the groundwater in aquifers. In an interview in December, 2010, Zafar Adeel, chair of the U.N. interagency coordinating mechanism for all fresh water-related issues asserts,

Climate change is all about water. Climate change will affect all societies and ecosystems most profoundly through the medium of water – the arrival of too much in some places, too little in others, and at unexpected times. Changes to precipitation patterns have already been documented and are expected to amplify through global warming.¹⁹³

The symbiotic relationship between climate patterns and the hydrological cycle requires that each maintains the quality that supports the process. The climate must be receptive to the rising vapor that enters the atmosphere to water all life forms allowing it, then, to return to its sources to begin the process anew. If the climate is too warm the vapor evaporates

¹⁹² Suzanne Goldberg, “U.S. Military Warned to Prepare for Consequences to Climate Change,” *The Guardian* November 9, 2012, <http://theguardian.com/world/2012/nov/09/us-military-warned-climate-change>.

¹⁹³ Adeel, Zafar. “Interview with UN-Water Chair: Climate Change and Water.” *Un Water*. October 7, 2014. <http://unwater.org/other-resources/for-the-media/interviews/adeel-2010-2/en/>.

causing less precipitation and greater risk for drought conditions. The cycle is interrupted, leaving water sources in confusion, unable to continue their life-sustaining work.

Scientists are not the only ones who see the dangers changing climate patterns pose. In his message on The World Day of Peace in 1990, Pope John Paul II expressed his concerns regarding climate change:

The gradual depletion of the ozone layer and the related greenhouse effect has now reached crisis proportions as a consequence of industrial growth, massive urban concentrations and vastly increased energy needs. Industrial waste, the burning of fossil fuels, unrestricted deforestation, the use of certain types of herbicides, coolants, and propellants: all of these are known to harm the atmosphere and the environment. The resulting meteorological and atmospheric changes range from damage to health to the possible future submersion of low-lying lands.¹⁹⁴

When science and religion – seemingly disparate entities – can speak with one voice as they observe the consequences of practices that negatively impact the world because they both have an unselfish interest in preserving life. As the *Joint Appeal by Religion and Science for the Environment* states “we are people of faith and of science who, for centuries, often have traveled different roads. In a time of environmental crisis, we find these roads converging.”¹⁹⁵ The preservation of life is entirely dependent on the water that gives rise to and sustains all life, the water that is severely threatened by the warming atmospheric trends that interfere with water’s ability to replenish it. Theologian Celia

¹⁹⁴ John Paul II, *World Day of Peace*, January 1, 1990, W2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/messages/peacedocuments.

¹⁹⁵ “Declaration of the Mission to Washington,” in *This Sacred Earth: Religion, Nature, Environment*, edited by Roger S. Gottlieb (New York: Taylor and Francis Books, 2004) 735.

Deane-Drummond reflects, “the impacts of climate change on the ecology of both human and non-human communities are through factors such as rising sea level and the increase in number and frequency of climate extremes, floods and droughts becoming more common due to a more intense hydrological cycle.”¹⁹⁶ Scientists, religious leaders and theologians, as well as those in the public sector who are closely observing water’s continued diminishment consistently speak to the dangers of global warming, but those with the power to effect change do not seem to appreciate the urgency of a response. As Famiglietti urged in response to California’s water crisis, the public needs to take ownership of efforts to affect the process of climate change and speak to this crisis while recovery is possible.

Dam the Water

Climate change affects the quantity of water available within the hydrological cycle. The water that returns to the earth’s surface during the cycle must then be managed sustainably. Water management is a crucial factor in the availability of fresh water. Although only a very small percentage of the earth’s water is available for human consumption, if well-managed, it accommodates need even in light of growing population. The editors of *Earthcare* explain that, “fortunately, due to the water cycle, that tiny fraction is constantly collected, purified, and redistributed. The system works well as long as water is not degraded or withdrawn faster than it can be cleaned and replenished.”¹⁹⁷ For too long, human activity has disrupted the cycle by interfering with surface running water through the creation of dams, underground pipes, and other modifications that attempt to control the water flow. Christiana Peppard explains the role of technology in this process:

¹⁹⁶ Celia Deane-Drummond, *Eco-Theology* (Winona, MN: St. Mary’s Press, 2008) 5.

¹⁹⁷ David Clowney and Patricia Mosto, Eds., *Earthcare: An Anthology in Environmental Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2009) 463.

the tale of the green revolution must also be told as a tale of hydraulic technologies. As agriculture expanded to arid and semi-arid lands, more water was required to grow economically desirable but thirsty crops, like cotton. Dams, irrigation canals, and groundwater extraction brought the water to thirsty farms. These hydraulic technologies facilitated the twentieth-century's six-fold increase in the amount of water withdrawn and used.¹⁹⁸

At times these efforts were guided by a sincere effort to provide water to areas in need – water-poor locations like Southern California. However, although the intention is worthwhile, the impact is less so when the water is used disproportionately for agricultural use. Managed poorly, the re-directed water is over-used and wasted, creating new water problems.

Aldo Leopold saw the danger inherent in re-directing water flow to satisfy agricultural needs. He observes, “it was inevitable and no doubt desirable that the tremendous momentum of industrialization should have spread to farm life. It is clear to me, however, that it has overshot the mark, in the sense that it is generating new insecurities, economic and ecological, in place of those it was meant to abolish”¹⁹⁹ Sam Edmondson explains the consequences of the massive dams that were constructed to address the big agricultural projects of which Leopold speaks. Edmondson notes these projects:

started spreading like wildfire in the late 19th century. These required tremendous amounts of water, so the state (California) domesticated its wild rivers to meet the

¹⁹⁸ Christiana Z. Peppard, *Just Water: Theology, Ethics, and the Global water Crisis* (Maryknoll, NY: 2014) 79.

¹⁹⁹ Aldo Leopold, *For the Health of the land: Previously Unpublished Essays and Other Writings*, edited by J Baird Callicott and Eric T. Freyfogle (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2001), 218.

need. Shasta dam, the main barrier on the Sacramento, was completed in 1945.

Other dams followed, as did the system of diversions and water pumps that subjugated the river to human industry.²⁰⁰

As a result the hydrological cycle was disturbed because of impediments to the natural flow of water that should have been deposited in the river.

Concern over the negative impact of damming water grew in the late twentieth century to the extent that a commission was formed in 1998 to address the continuing support for the construction of large dams. The report issued by the World Commission on Dams in 2000 concludes that “while dams have made an important and significant contribution to development, in too many cases an unacceptable and often unnecessary price has been paid to secure those benefits, especially in social and environmental terms, by people displaced, by communities downstream, by taxpayers and the natural environment.”²⁰¹ Fortunately, in the United States, the negative consequences of damming water has been recognized, so the construction of dams has been halted; but in many parts of the world the practice continues – with devastating impact on peoples and the environment. The editors of *Earthcare* report that:

according to the World Commission on Water, in the twenty-first century, half of the world’s major rivers are going dry part of the year or are seriously polluted due to damming. The World Resources Institute (WRI 2007) estimates that 60 percent of the major river basins in the world have been affected by dam construction.²⁰²

²⁰⁰ Sam Edmondson, “Running on Empty” *Earthjustice Quarterly* 124, Fall (2013) 10.

²⁰¹ World Commission on Dams, *Dams and Development, A New Framework for Decision-Making*: (London: Earthscan, 2000) xxviii.

²⁰² David Clowney and Patricia Mosto, ed., *Earthcare: An Anthology in Environmental Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2009) 464.

The Three Gorges Dam in China is one such example of dam construction that adversely affects the people and environment in the area. Peppard explains that this dam – begun in 2006 – “is part of China’s long-term energy, hydrological, and economic strategies, but it has also been the subject of intense scrutiny and international critique.”²⁰³ *The International Rivers Network* advocacy group calls it “the world’s largest hydropower project and most notorious dam.”²⁰⁴ The displacement of peoples and flooding of lands due to the dam’s abuse of the water flow is highly detrimental to the peoples and environment of the region, but since all of creation is part of the web of life, China’s dam is a worldwide matter raising the concern of international groups like the Rivers Network. It, therefore, lends further evidence to the argument that there must be a broad vision as well as a global partnership to safeguard the earth’s water supply.

Fish Out of Water

The broad vision regarding the concern over damming water looks at and beyond the construction of dams to the long-term consequences to all who depend on free-flowing water. Sea life is completely dependent on the availability of sufficient water supply to support its nourishment and reproductive practices. When dams interfere with the natural flow the consequences are dire. Van Noppen explains “the pumps are powerful enough to make a river run backwards...but in giving life to some, the pumps take it from others; in this case entire salmon runs that are dying off because the rivers no longer have enough water to support the salmon migration to the ocean.”²⁰⁵ When salmon and other fish are prevented from following the waters’ natural flow their ability to spawn is diminished. In

²⁰³ Christiana Z. Peppard, *Just Water: Theology, Ethics, and the Global water Crisis* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014) 84.

²⁰⁴ “Three Gorges Dam,” *International Rivers Network*, March 2015, www.internationalrivers.org/campaigns/three-gorges-dam.

²⁰⁵ Trip Van Noppen, “When the Web of Life Tears,” *Earthjustice*, Fall (2013) 4.

1988, Edmondson reports, “winter-run king salmon on California’s Sacramento River were in free fall – only 2000 adults had returned to spawn, down from an average of 200,000 before the river’s dam was first constructed.”²⁰⁶ Does it matter? They are only fish! According to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration “wild salmon are a significant economic driver in the Eastern Pacific, fetching \$555 million in 2010 landings alone. Salmon also have tremendous cultural, recreational, and biological importance in the region.”²⁰⁷ The agency estimates the U.S. fishing industry provides more than one million jobs and billions of dollars to our economy. Providing safe and plentiful water for migration protects both the fish and the humans who rely on their survival.

However, as NOAA points out, “salmon species on the West Coast of the United States have experienced dramatic decline in abundance during the past several decades as a result of human-induced and natural factors, such as dams, habitat loss, urbanization, agricultural and logging practices, water diversion, and ocean and climatic conditions.”²⁰⁸ Until people take seriously the web of life, they will continue to misuse and abuse our natural resources to the detriment of every species. Naturalist and conservationist John Muir wrote “when we try to pick out anything by itself, we find it hitched to everything else in the Universe.”²⁰⁹ It may be that we are no longer able to mend the web of life, but we may still be able to strengthen the strands that still exist by taking measures that lead to replenishing our water supply.

Groundwater

²⁰⁶ Sam Edmondson, “Running on Empty” *Earthjustice Quarterly*, Fall, 2013,12.

²⁰⁷“Pacific Salmonids: Major Threats and Impacts,” *NOAA Fisheries*, May 15, 2014, <http://www.nmfs.noaa.gov/pr/species/fish/salmon.htm>

²⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

²⁰⁹ John Muir, *My First Summer in the Sierra* (Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004) 110.

Such restoration attempts scrutinize every human activity that leads to unhealthy water, including water invisible on the surface of the earth. Much of our fresh water is hidden beneath the earth; Peppard says; “the groundwater hidden from view amounts to thirty percent of all the freshwater on this planet.”²¹⁰ The adage out of sight, out of mind, suggesting that something we cannot see is unimportant, might be tempting to adopt since so much of what we can see demands attention; however, this is disastrous when it comes to healthy water. In the United States groundwater “is the source of drinking water for about half of the total population and nearly all of the rural population, and it provides over fifty billion gallons per day for agricultural needs,”²¹¹ explains the USGS Water Science School. Much of this groundwater is stored in deep underground caverns called aquifers which remained untouched throughout most of the earth’s history. Peppard explains: for most of human history large-scale groundwater extraction simply wasn’t possible. It was too deep, too diffuse, required too much energy to draw up – basically, it was just too hard to get. But then, during the twentieth century, new hydraulic technologies effectively increased the available fresh water supply for agriculture, manufacturing, and domestic uses. This hydraulic “discovery” of deep groundwater had cascading effects: massive agricultural expansion, significant population growth, and amplified industrialization.²¹² This new-found development might have been miraculous were it not for the recharging ability of aquifers; they can take from only ten thousand to millions of years to refill. Peppard continues, “it makes sense, then, that water experts often refer to the water in aquifers as ‘fossil water’ and the extraction of this water as ‘water mining.’ Once we use it,

²¹⁰ Christiana Z. Peppard, *Just Water: Theology, Ethics, and the Global water Crisis* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014) 85.

²¹¹ “Groundwater Depletion” *The USGS Water Science School*, March 9, 2015, <http://water.usgs.gov/edu/gwdepletion.html>.

²¹² Christiana Z. Peppard, *Just Water: Theology, Ethics, and the Global water Crisis* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis 2014) 85.

we lose it.”²¹³ Therefore, it is obviously absurd to think that because we do not see groundwater we do not have to critique its over-use when we strive to address paths to a sufficient water supply. What we can see, taste, and smell, is clear evidence of groundwater depletion. Peppard explains the significance of aquifers when she says, “salination (when the water inside an aquifer turns brackish), sea-water intrusion (which ruins the aquifer as a source of fresh water)...and subsidence of land atop the aquifers (literally, sinkholes)...For these reasons, aquifers are the most important things you’ve never seen.”²¹⁴ Since the Earth’s groundwater is not quickly or easily replenished, scientists and ecologists scrutinize and evaluate the depletion of this valuable resource the planet needs for survival. Sustained pumping of groundwater risks depletion leading to “drying up of wells, reduction of water in streams and lakes, deterioration of water quality, increased pumping costs, and land subsidence (sink-holes),²¹⁵ explains the USGS, all of which are disastrous to humans and the planet. However, groundwater is *out of mind* as people continue to pump it for human use as if there is an endless supply. It is not only its depletion that is at risk, it is also pumping’s effect on the surface water. According to the USGS:

groundwater pumping can alter how water moves between an aquifer and a stream, lake, or wetland by either intercepting groundwater flow that discharges into the surface-water body under natural conditions, or by increasing the rate of water movement from the surface water-body into an aquifer. A related effect of groundwater pumping is the lowering of groundwater levels below the depth that

²¹³ Ibid., 26.

²¹⁴ Ibid., 26–27.

²¹⁵ “Groundwater Depletion” *The USGS Water Science School*, March 9, 2015, <http://water.usgs.gov/edu/gwdepletion.html>.

streamside or wetland vegetation needs to survive. The overall effect is a loss of riparian vegetation and wildlife habitat.²¹⁶

This concern will be highlighted later in this paper through attention to the treatment of the water in the Florida Everglades; for now, the broad-based concern over groundwater depletion is evident as even NASA officials have entered the conversation. Jay Famiglietti, working with NASA's Gravity Recovery and Climate Experiment researchers, determined "water is being pumped from aquifers at a much faster rate than we previously thought, and at a rate that that cannot be replenished naturally."²¹⁷ Currently, there is very little that can be done to stop the rapid pace of groundwater removal. Famiglietti describes the regulatory system in most areas as "a veritable, groundwater free-for-all. California has recently enacted groundwater regulation, but it could take up to twenty-five years to be fully implemented."²¹⁸ Measures need to be adopted at a much faster pace to prevent groundwater from dropping to levels that seriously impact fresh water supply and from which restoration is no longer possible.

Thirteen years ago Robert Glennon sounded an alarm about groundwater depletion in America. He cautioned "excessive groundwater pumping has caused the ground to collapse; rivers, lakes and springs to dry up; and riparian habitat to die. If we continue to exploit our groundwater resources in this way, we will eventually run out."²¹⁹ Another twenty-five years to adopt enforceable regulations that limit groundwater pumping is much too long in light of the evidence that aquifers are suffering at the hands of human abuse.

²¹⁶ Ibid.

²¹⁷ Jay Famiglietti, "Can We End the Global Water Crisis," *National Geographic*, June 2013, <http://voices.nationalgeographic.com/2013/06/10/can-we-end-the-global-water-crisis/>.

²¹⁸ Ibid.

²¹⁹ Robert Glennon, *Water Follies: Groundwater Pumping and the Fate of America's Fresh Waters* (Washington, DC: Island Press, 2002), 123.

Groundwater depletion, not only in California but throughout the world, is no longer hidden far beneath the surface of the earth; its effects are now visible to the naked eye on a cotton farm in Lubbock, Texas. The Ogallala Aquifer supplies water to the cotton farms in Lubbock, Texas, as well as to much of the agriculture in the Midwest. In his article in *Harpers Magazine*, Wil S. Hylton describes this aquifer:

Sprawling beneath eight states and more than 100 million acres, the Ogallala Aquifer is the kind of hydrological behemoth that lends itself to rhapsody and hubris. Ancient, epic, apparently endless, it is the largest subterranean water supply in the country, with an estimated capacity of a million-billion gallons, providing nearly a third of all groundwater irrigation. If the aquifer were somehow raised to the surface, it would cover a larger area than any freshwater lake on earth – by a factor of five.²²⁰

And yet, the water in the aquifer, Peppard warns, “has declined, on average, five to six feet per year; since 1990 the water in that aquifer has diminished approximately 100 feet.”²²¹

The Circle of Blue – a non-profit water think tank and journalism center – confirms the damage to the Ogallala Aquifer as it relates to the cotton farm in Texas. In an article written by Brett Walton the effects of a diminishing water supply in the aquifer is noticed in the cotton yield of two farms, one just to the East of the other. They note:

Evidence of the famed aquifer’s value is in the ruddy soil behind a federal agricultural research center where an irrigated field of cotton grows thigh-high dense with puffy knots of white fiber signaling it is ready for late October harvest.

²²⁰ Wil S. Hylton “Broken Heartland: The Looming Collapse of Agriculture on the Great Plains” *Harpers Magazine*, July 2012.

²²¹ Christiana Z. Peppard, *Just Water: Theology, Ethics, and the Global water Crisis* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014) 86.

But in a second field to the east the contrast astonishes. The plants in the adjacent plot are skeletal and barely tall enough to reach a man's knee. The few cotton bolls that did bud look as pathetic as a bald Charlie Brown tree hung with a handful of ornaments. The second plot reflects a long predicted change in water supply that is producing unsettling consequences for agriculture in one of the country's important cotton and wheat belts... The Ogallala Aquifer is gradually being pumped dry.²²²

Again, in spite of being fore-warned, scientists and farmers are now scrambling to find solutions that will sustain this most important crop as the aquifer will no longer provide the water needed to irrigate the fields. It seems that delay is the keyword that describes the response to groundwater depletion in both California and Texas, two arid areas of the country that can expect even greater demands on the water supply in the future. However, postponing action that addresses the need to find alternate methods of irrigation that do not rely on pumping groundwater lend credence to the Circle of Blue analysis which predicts a sustained "economic and social reckoning that some of the world's agricultural hotspots will face in the coming decades."²²³ Walton says, these farming regions "are sucking out groundwater at unsustainable rates. Some 1.7 billion people, roughly a quarter of the world's population, live in areas where aquifers are under stress."²²⁴ Walton's analysis depicts the tortoise-like approach to correcting the problem but recognizes the attempts that water districts in the Texas High plains are making to adopt an irrigation path less reliant on groundwater pumping. He writes "looking ahead, energy evangelists see a new

²²² Brett Walton, "Texas High Plains Prepare for Agriculture Without Irrigation," *Circle of Blue*, April 5, 2013, <http://circleofblue.org/waternews/2013/world/texas-ogallala-photos/>

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

economic beginning in the regions ample wind currents. But the environmental, legal, and cultural hurdles to achieve these adaptations show just how difficult the transition away from irrigated agriculture will be.”²²⁵ These are not merely alarmists’ perspectives that we can choose to ignore, since the critical scientific evidence says otherwise. Groundwater depletion due to agricultural use is not only of concern to scientists and farmers; the social doctrine of the Catholic Church addressed the urgency of a response to this continuing over-use of water. *The Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church* maintains that “radical and urgent changes” are necessary “in order to restore to agriculture – and to rural people- their just value as the basis for a healthy economy, within the social community’s development as a whole.”²²⁶ The evidence is clear to all sectors of society that steps must be taken to protect our aquifers so that our children, grandchildren, and succeeding generations enjoy access to healthy water and vibrant crops that produce quality food and goods.

Water, Water Everywhere Nor Any Drop to Drink

In Samuel Taylor Coleridge’s poem, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner* the poet bemoans that his ship is surrounded by water but no fresh water is available to quench his thirst. Contemporary concerns echo the mariner’s as we consider the quality of water that will be available to future generations, questioning if that water will be healthy, free from contaminants, and resistant to saltwater intrusion. The decreasing availability of clean water due to contamination, misuse, and destruction of groundwater has heightened awareness of the critical need to address water quality and access to healthy water in the

²²⁵ Ibid.

²²⁶ “Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church,” *Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace*, chapter 6, #299, April 2005, http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc.

future. Deane-Drummond explains “in 2000 the World Health Organization estimated that 1.1 billion people could not meet their basic need for clean water... In addition, 40 percent of the world’s population is short of fresh water, and that is expected to rise to over 50 percent by 2032.”²²⁷ These are startling and disturbing statistics that signal the immediacy of a response to restore clean water to the planet; the first step is to examine current practices that contaminate our water supply. As in the issue of climate change, all sectors of society must engage the questions that emerge when water purification efforts are considered. Science and technology speak to new techniques that will prevent further pollution and clean our current water resources, people of faith address the moral and ethical response to denying healthy water to all who depend on it, and the public in every part of the world resists the actions of those who choose to control water access for personal gain.

As science/technology, religion and the public consider their particular involvement in securing healthy water for ours and future generations the first question that deserves attention is what, precisely, is water? The answers vary depending on who is questioned. Those who are interested in profiting from water define it as a commodity. Peppard explains, “to define water as a commodity is to assume that water can and should be owned, that it can and should be sold and traded in the market economy, and that the profit motive is a reasonable component of this process.”²²⁸ Identifying water in this way motivates competition to secure as much water as possible in the same way that one might accumulate any product to be sold. However, without water life is not possible. Of course, water as a commodity has already established itself as a fixture in society as bottled water

²²⁷ Celia Deane-Drummond, *Eco-Theology* (Winona, MN: St. Mary’s Press, 2008) 3.

²²⁸ Christiana Z. Peppard, *Just Water: Theology, Ethics, and the Global Water Crisis* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014) 43.

lines the shelves of stores throughout the world. Attempts to confront using water for profit, mostly efforts by university students, have been minimally successful, but some continue to press for greater restrictions on using water as a commodity. Water expert Peter Gleick approaches the issue from a different perspective. Rather than attempting to oppose the bottled water industry he argues “if everyone on the planet had access to affordable safe tap water, bottled water would be seen as unnecessary...If public sources of drinking water were more accessible, arguments about the convenience of bottled water would seem silly,”²²⁹ placing the burden for access to pure drinking water on those most responsible for our water supply.

The second definition for water says that water is not a commodity, but a human right, something due to all people, regardless of their ability to pay. Peppard analyzes, “many people insist that fresh water should be considered as a public good or as part of the ‘global commons’ meaning that fresh water is the kind of thing that should never be owned by any individual or corporation – nor bought, sold, or used to generate profit.”²³⁰ It would seem that the human right position is losing as those using water as a commodity are flourishing. But if clean water is not a right available to all life on the planet, and is accessible only to those who are able to pay for it, what happens when free-flowing water is so diminished and so polluted that it no longer supports life on Earth? Each year on World Water Day groups throughout the world engage the debate to define water; Peppard explains, “news outlets publish op-eds on fresh water and government officials invoke the significance of fresh water for development and peace throughout the world.”²³¹ But confronting the fresh water issue one day a year is not likely to move us forward to

²²⁹ Ibid., 40.

²³⁰ Ibid., 43-44.

²³¹ Ibid., 45.

providing clean healthy water to all life on earth. The Catholic Church has been a strong voice in support of water as a right. Peppard notes “in 2012 The Catholic Church again sent an official memorandum to the World Water Forum that emphasized the fundamental human right to fresh water, over and against its status as an economic commodity.”²³² If humanity is to resolve the central issue regarding fresh water – what is it and who controls it – more voices like this must be heard 365 days a year.

The public is hearing the commodity/human right debate over water in newspapers like the *Chicago Tribune*. In July of 2014 an article written by Robert Koehler defended the human right position when he notes “Water is our common need, our common source of being,”²³³ relating his defense to withholding water from people in Detroit Michigan who are unable to pay their water bill. Like the mariner in Coleridge’s poem, Koehler points out the irony that, although “surrounded by the Great lakes, the largest body of fresh water in the world,”²³⁴ many of Detroit’s poor do not have a drop to drink until they pay for water. In response, Koehler “thirsts for a different sort of world, one in which water is not just another commodity, something to be controlled, to one’s own advantage and another’s detriment.”²³⁵ Like the Catholic Church’s argument, Koehler remarks that it is the poor who suffer when water is a commodity; it is the poor who cannot enter the commodities market to secure the water they need for survival.

Academia has participated in the debate as well. In 2010, Velma Grover presented both sides of the argument appealing to the World Health Organization for the human right

²³² Ibid.

²³³ Robert Koehler, “Water: Commodity or Human Right,” *Tribune Content Agency*, July 31, 2014, <http://tribunecontentagency.com/article/water-commodity-or-human-right/>.

²³⁴ Ibid.

²³⁵ Ibid.

position and the World Trade Organization that opts for water as a commodity. Grover points out that

While Article 25 of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights does not mention water explicitly, it does mention the right to food, which includes water. Water is essential to live. The access to water should, therefore, be a basic/fundamental right with universal access. Therefore, according to the World Health Organization, each citizen should be assured 20 liters of water by the governments.²³⁶

Although, Grover explains the World Trade position arguing for water as a commodity, she concludes that “this would imply that water is available for people with money, meaning the scarcity is rooted in power, poverty, and inequality and not in the physical availability.”²³⁷ This is the crux of the argument: should water be accessible to all – a guaranteed right based on its necessity for survival, or used as an economic subsidy by those who have wealth and power? As a response to the debate, “on July 28,2010, the U.N. passed a General Convention that identified access to water and sanitation as universal human rights.”²³⁸ Shortly after, the U.N. Human Rights Council issued a statement recognizing the right to safe and clean drinking water and sanitation declaring:

following the UN General Assembly Resolution, this Resolution of the Human Rights Council affirms that the rights to water and sanitation are part of existing international law and these rights are legally binding upon States. It also calls upon States to develop appropriate tools and mechanisms to achieve progressively

²³⁶ Velma I. Grover, “Water: A Human Right or a Commodity?” *SERONICA: The Journal of Socio Environmental Research Organization*, September (2010) 3.

²³⁷ *Ibid.*, 6.

²³⁸ Christiana Z. Peppard, *Just Water: Theology, Ethics, and the Global Water Crisis* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014) 43.

the full realization of human rights obligations related to access to safe drinking water and sanitation, including in currently unserved and underserved areas.²³⁹

Although the debate over access to water continues, the United Nations statement is the guiding principle for my work in this paper. That statement affirms the position that water is a human right, arguing that governments have a responsibility to provide clean fresh water to all. In this regard, an examination of some of the practices that interfere with cleaning up the Earth's water and create impediments to access to clean water and sanitation is necessary.

The Age of Chemicals

As population growth exploded in the latter half of the twentieth century somehow food supply in the United States kept pace with the increased demand. This was, in large part, due to the use of agricultural chemicals that dramatically increased the rate of production for crop yields. Farmers no longer had to depend on organic fertilizers to enrich their crops. Richard Misrach and Kate Orff explain that “ammonium nitrates, used for explosives in World War II, were re-deployed toward synthetic fertilizers and placed on American farms,”²⁴⁰ replacing the biological process of feeding crops. This might have been a panacea for farmers but the effect on the water supply was disastrous. As Katherine Gustafson explains:

The massive use of nitrogen fertilizers created out of fossil fuels ...allows for large-scale mechanized production by fewer and fewer farmers but also pollutes groundwater, acidifies soil, and threatens biodiversity. These fertilizers are used in excess, as crops

²³⁹ “Human Rights and Access to Safe Drinking Water and Sanitation,” *United Nations General Assembly*, resolution A/HRC/RES/15/9, September 2010, <http://righttowater.eu/sites/water/files/UNHRC%20resolution%2015-9.pdf>.

²⁴⁰ Kate Orff and Richard Misrach, *Petrochemical America* (New York: Aperture, 2012), 183.

only absorb about one-half of the nitrogen in fertilizers that are applied to fields, leaving tons to run off into waterways and wreak havoc on marine ecosystems.²⁴¹

Recognizing the devastating effect chemical fertilizers were having on groundwater, some countries banned their use. The European Union led the movement to discontinue using nitrogen-based fertilizers but the United States did not follow suit. Peppard warns, “in the U.S. Midwest, atrazine is deployed for many reasons... after application, atrazine is absorbed into the land and flows as runoff into the Mississippi and other rivers where it permeates the water supply.”²⁴² The Natural Resources Defense Council also warned about the use of atrazine more than six years ago when, following a water analysis for atrazine it “found pervasive contamination of watersheds and drinking water systems across the Midwest and Southern United States”²⁴³ It seems that, until there is a national outcry against the use of chemical fertilizers, the government entities that are responsible to protect our water, and the agriculture industry that provides what we put into our bodies will refuse to take action to guarantee safe water. The Environmental Protection Agency, the major governing body for the protection of our water supply, estimates: millions of tons of fertilizers and pesticides (e.g., herbicides, insecticides, rodenticides, fungicides, and avicides) are used annually in the United States for crop production. In addition to farmers, homeowners, businesses (e.g., golf courses), utilities, and municipalities use these chemicals. A number of these pesticides and fertilizers (some highly toxic) have entered and contaminated

²⁴¹ Katherine Gustafson, *Change Comes to Dinner: How Vertical Farmers, Urban Growers, and Other Innovators Are Revolutionizing How America Eats* (New York: St. Martin’s Griffin, 2012), 201-202.

²⁴² Christiana Z. Peppard, *Just Water: Theology, Ethics, and the Global Water Crisis* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014) 78.

²⁴³ “Atrazine: Poisoning the Well,” *Natural Resources Defense Council*, August 2009, <https://www.nrdc.org/health/atrazine/files/atrazine.pdf>.

ground water following normal, registered use. Some pesticides remain in soil and water for many months to many years.²⁴⁴

And yet, these farmers and businesses have been permitted to continue to use these toxic chemicals endangering our water supply for many years to come. Thirty years ago the Agency conducted a National Pesticide Survey to determine the number of drinking water wells nationwide that contains pesticides and nitrates and the concentration of these substances. It analyzed the factors associated with contamination of drinking water wells by pesticides and nitrates. The survey, which included samples from more than 1,300 public community and rural domestic water supply wells, found that approximately 3.6 percent of the wells contained concentrations of nitrates above the federal maximum contaminant level, and that over half of the wells contained nitrates above the survey's minimum reporting limit for nitrate (0.15 mg/L).²⁴⁵ With all of this information at our disposal for so many years it would seem reasonable to expect action from officials that bans the use of these chemicals, but to date that is not the case. The *Clean Water Act* attempted to establish greater protections for our oceans, rivers, wetlands and streams from industrial and farming pollution. The National Resources Defense Council reports, "since 1972 the clean water act has protected our nation's water resources from unregulated pollution, filling and destruction. But rollbacks over the past decade have eroded the law's requirements."²⁴⁶ Meanwhile, Van Noppen points out, "on the 40th anniversary of the *Clean Water Act*, forty percent of U.S. waterways are not fit for fishing, swimming, or

²⁴⁴ Tom Belk, *Wellhead Protection: A Guide for Small Communities* (Darby, PA: Diane Publishing, 1994) 17.

²⁴⁵ Ibid.

²⁴⁶ "Advancing America's Clean Water Legacy," *National Resources Defense Council*, September 4, 2014, <http://nrdc.org/water/files/clean-water-legacy-FS.pdf>.

drinking.”²⁴⁷ More than two years later concerns over potable water have heightened rather than diminished. It does not seem that we are not able to clean up our water supplies, but rather we do not have the will or will bear the cost to do so.

The effects of groundwater contamination are many and pervasive. Polluted surface water is relatively easy to see, taste, and smell, but contaminated groundwater is less so but equally harmful. As chemicals and other contaminants seep underground the water that is pumped to replace surface water contains the pollutants that degraded its purity. The Environmental Protection Agency expresses concerns over the degradation of ground water:

Contamination of ground water can result in poor drinking water quality, loss of water supply, degraded surface water systems, high cleanup costs, and high costs for alternative water supplies, and/or potential health problems. The consequences of contaminated ground water or degraded surface water are often serious. In terms of water supply, in some instances, ground water contamination is so severe that the water supply must be abandoned as a source of drinking water.²⁴⁸

Once the groundwater is contaminated the process to clean it is very difficult and, at times, even impossible. The Agency explains, “because ground water generally moves slowly, contamination often remains undetected for long periods of time. This makes cleanup of a contaminated water supply difficult, if not impossible. If a cleanup is undertaken, it can cost thousands to millions of dollars.”²⁴⁹ It seems that it would be more prudent as well as more cost-effective to take the necessary steps to avoid groundwater contamination, rather than delaying and risk the time and expense to clean it. Although federal regulations are in

²⁴⁷ Trip Van Noppen, “Abused, Overused, Running Out...” *Earthjustice Quarterly Magazine*, Fall (2012) 4.

²⁴⁸ Tom Belk, *Wellhead Protection: A Guide for Small Communities* (Darby, PA: Diane Publishing, 1994) 17.

²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

place to protect groundwater, it has proven difficult for regulations to keep pace with the many ways groundwater is adversely affected.

Digging Deep

There is a relatively recent practice that poses new and grave dangers to our groundwater, the process of fracking the earth. Peppard describes fracking as “the injection of sand, chemicals, and copious amounts of water at high pressure, deep into geological formations. As the pressurized fluid penetrates crevices of pebble and rock, shale oil or natural gas from tiny air pockets rises to the surface followed by a regurgitation of water and fracking solution.”²⁵⁰ Food and Water Watch determined that “fracking for oil and natural gas is too dangerous: it threatens the water we drink, the air we breathe and our health.”²⁵¹ This public advocacy organization describes its mission as championing “healthy food and clean water for all. Humanity stand up to corporations that put profits before people, and advocate for a democracy that improves people’s lives and protects our environment.”²⁵² The organization adopts the position that water is a right and not a commodity. But, is there evidence to support the contention that fracking is dangerous to our water supply? The Natural Resources Defense Council points out that “the millions of gallons of water use in fracking operations not only strain water resources, but end up as vast amounts of contaminated waste water. Fracking has been reported as a suspect in polluted drinking water around the country.”²⁵³ Jessica H. Knoblauch, writing on fracking for *Earthjustice*, describes the water used in fracking as “laced with sand and toxic

²⁵⁰ Christiana Z. Peppard, *Just Water: Theology, Ethics, and the Global Water Crisis* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 2014) 144.

²⁵¹ Wenonah Hauter, “The Urgent Case for a Ban on Fracking,” *Food and Water Watch*, February, 2015, www.foodandwaterwatch.org/water/sites/default/files/urgent-Ban-on-fracking,

²⁵² *Ibid.*

²⁵³ “Unchecked Fracking Threatens Health, Water Supplies,” *National Resources Defense Council*, nd, www.nrdc.org/energy/gasdrilling/.

chemicals like formaldehyde and hydrochloric acid.”²⁵⁴ In her argument that fracking is dangerous to our water, Knoblauch relies upon information provided by the Environmental Protection Agency that, in 2011

linked underground water pollution with hydraulic fracturing in central Wyoming. And in 2012, new research found that natural fluids beneath Pennsylvania’s gas fields are likely seeping into the state’s drinking water, a finding that contradicts the industry’s insistence that injected materials won’t migrate out of deeply buried deep rock layers.²⁵⁵

The suspicion and evidence that fracking is dangerous to water quality has become so prevalent that towns and cities caught up in the oil industry’s securement of land for fracking fought to maintain the right to prevent it. The first successful ban was issued in Cooperstown, New York, which set the stage for other communities throughout the United States to rebel against fracking. Knoblauch is encouraged that, “since then, New York’s local bans have been duplicated across the country as hundreds of citizens limited or banned fracking in their area by invoking the traditional power of communities to regulate land use and protect the local character.”²⁵⁶ The concern these communities address is two-fold: the huge quantity of water necessary for the fracking process and the quality of the water that is emitted as runoff. This water is so polluted it may not be used as a resource for any other purpose. Bart Miller, water program director at Western Resource Advocates recently wrote in an op-ed in the *Denver Post* that “most frack water is so laden with toxics or salts that it is unsuitable for other uses and must be disposed of in shallow pits (where it is a hazard to wildlife) or far below groundwater reservoirs (where we can only hope it will

²⁵⁴Jessica H. Knoblauch, “Fracking Strikes Out In Cooperstown” *Earthjustice*, Fall (2012) 10.

²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 11.

never migrate and contaminate drinking water reservoirs.”²⁵⁷ Neither of these options is conducive to protecting our water supply or advancing efforts to clean up contaminated surface water. The dangers posed by hydraulic fracturing outweigh any potential benefit from bolstering our national fossil fuel reserves – an effort which should be questioned, even were it not for the risks to the earth’s water – dangers that threaten the health of all life forms.

Who Suffers? The Human Impact of the Scarcity and Pollution of Water

Water scarcity and pollution impact the health of children and adults throughout the world; according to UNICEF “748 million people do not have access to safe, clean drinking water, and more than 2.5 billion people live without proper sanitation”²⁵⁸ In this section I consider the human health consequences of this lack of access. Water quality and water quantity are two sides of the same coin; the United Nations points out, “water quality is just as important as water quantity for satisfying basic human and environmental needs. Moreover, the two are inextricably linked.”²⁵⁹ Therefore, although my focus in the present discussion is contaminated water, the connection between scarcity and pollution remains intact.

At the outset it is important to recognize the pervasive potential of contaminants to water sources. A number of microorganisms and thousands of synthetic chemicals have the potential to contaminate ground water. Drinking water containing bacteria and viruses can result in illnesses such as hepatitis, cholera, or giardiasis. Methemoglobinemia or “blue baby syndrome,” an illness affecting infants, can be caused by drinking water that is high in

²⁵⁷ Bart Miller, “Mandate reuse of oil and gas wastewater,” *The Denver Post*, May 19, 2013, http://denverpost.com/ci_23261472/yes-water-too-scarce-use-up.

²⁵⁸ UNICEF, “UNICEF Tap Project Challenges Americans to Stop Using Their Phones to Provide 14 Million Days of Clean Water to Children,” February 17, 2015, www.unicefusa.org/mission/survival/water.

²⁵⁹ UN Water, “Water Quality,” March 27, 2015 www.unwater.org/topics/water-quality/en/.

nitrate. Benzene, a component of gasoline, is a known human carcinogen. The serious health effects of lead are well known—learning disabilities in children; nerve, kidney, and liver problems; and pregnancy risks.²⁶⁰ Concentrations in drinking water of these and other substances are regulated by federal and state laws. Hundreds of other chemicals, however, are not yet regulated, and many of their health effects are unknown or not well understood. Preventing contaminants from reaching the ground water is the best way to reduce the health risks associated with poor drinking water quality.

It is always the most vulnerable who are at greatest risk when any resource necessary for survival is unavailable or contaminated. Children are the most vulnerable of the vulnerable. The motto of the Children’s Defense Fund expresses this vulnerability with wonderful imagery: “Dear Lord be good to me. The sea is so wide and my boat is so small.”²⁶¹ Children and water are inseparable; a child sees a puddle and immediately races to it, open fire hydrants are a city child’s invitation to cool off, drinking fountains are magnets to children even if they are not thirsty. This natural attraction to water makes them susceptible to waterborne diseases that breed in unclean water sources. Alicia Dubay writes, “waterborne diseases are usually caused when a person drinks, bathes in, washes with or prepares food with water that has been contaminated with bacteria, viruses, or parasites...”²⁶² Marian Wright Edelman tells this story:

A family lives in a small village by a river – a mother, two girls, and a boy. The water isn’t clean, but the children play in it avoiding dead fish whose pale bellies

²⁶⁰ Ibid.

²⁶¹ Children’s Defense Fund, March 29, 2015, www.childrensdefense.org.

²⁶² Alicia Dubay, “Cholera and Waterborne Disease Facts,” March 30, 2015, www.worldvision.ca/ourwork.

roll on the surface. There's a mill or refinery or food processing plant several kilometers upstream that spews thick raw sludge into the river.²⁶³

Because children see only the water and not the potential for harm they take great pleasure in it unaware of the hidden bacteria floating on and beneath the surface. UNICEF reports, "some 75 percent of all cases of highly infectious acute watery diarrhea are among children under the age of five."²⁶⁴ Children's undeveloped immune systems are unable to fight back against the water-borne diseases that endanger their health and even their lives. Unicef warns, "poor sanitation conditions, a shortage of safe water, overcrowding and high malnutrition rates are the perfect combination for infectious diseases, such as cholera and pneumonia, to spread and increase death rates."²⁶⁵ The agency estimates that diarrhea resulting from unsafe water kills 1,600 children every day,²⁶⁶ a statistic that is alarming and preventable if only pure water was a top priority for governments and corporations throughout the world. Water.org compares the death of children from diarrhea "equivalent to the rate of a jumbo jet crashing every ten hours."²⁶⁷ Unfortunately, the children's deaths do not receive the same media attention that would be given to the crashes. It would seem that unsafe water and sanitation conditions are accepted as a fact of life rather than as an outrage that demands intense and ongoing attention.

Although children in developing countries are most vulnerable to waterborne diseases, U.S. water is not immune to infectious disease. Lakes, rivers, and oceans

²⁶³ Marian Wright Edelman, "Empowering Mother's Around the World," August 3, 2007, www.childrensdefense.org/newsroom/child-watch.

²⁶⁴ "Water-borne Disease are lethal Threat to Children in Southern Somalia," *UNICEF*, August 18, 2011, www.unicef.org/media/media_59585.html.

²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶⁶ "Diarrhea Remains a Leading Killer of Young Children Despite the Availability of a Simple Treatment Solution," *UNICEF*, November 2014, <http://data.unicef.org/child-health/diarroheal-disease/html>.

²⁶⁷ "Water Facts and Sanitation Facts," *Water.org*, March 30, 2015, <http://water.org/water-crisis/water-sanitation-facts/>.

contaminated by industrial waste and water run-off harbor bacteria that cause infections and disease in every part of the world. Children are most affected when they come in contact with this water since they are less able to resist the effect of the germs. Fortunately, in developed countries, medical advantages usually allow for treatment of the disease before it debilitates the child. Unfortunately, this is not the case in poor countries where exposure often leads to death.

The *Clean Water Act*, written in 1972, attempts to establish greater protections for our oceans, rivers, wetlands and streams. The National Resources Defense Council reports, “since 1972 the clean water act has protected our nation’s water resources from unregulated pollution, filling and destruction. But rollbacks over the past decade have eroded the law’s requirements.”²⁶⁸ The editor of *Earthjustice* says, “on the 40th anniversary of the *Clean Water Act*, forty percent of U.S. waterways are not fit for fishing, swimming, or drinking.”²⁶⁹ More than two years later concerns over potable water have heightened rather than diminished. It does not seem that we are not able to clean up our water supplies, but rather we do not have the will or will bear the cost to do so.

“Whiskey is for Drinking, Water is for fighting over”²⁷⁰

Polluted water kills children. If this horrible reality is not motivation enough to clean up our water supply, the impending conflicts over access to water might motivate a comprehensive response to our increasingly scarce and polluted water. Although experts disagree whether the scarcity of water will become a cause of conflict, there is evidence

²⁶⁸ *National Resources Defense Council*, “Advancing America’s Clean Water Legacy,” September 4, 2014. <http://www.nrdc.org/water/files/clean-water-legacy-FS.pdf>.

²⁶⁹ Trip Van Noppen, “Abused, Overused, Running Out.” *Earthjustice* Quarterly Magazine, Fall, 2012, 4.

²⁷⁰ Kenneth Verosub, “Whiskey is for Drinking, Water is for Fighting Over Coping with Transboundary Water Disputes in a Water Scarce World,” April 27, 2010, <http://www.state.gov/e/stas/series/154219.htm>.

that it precipitated disagreements in the past and continues to be worth fighting for today.

Diane Raines Ward asserts

Water has already been a factor in igniting at least one full-scale conflict – the Six Day War of 1967, when the Arab League, angered at Israel’s construction of its National Water Carrier, which had appropriated much of the water of the Jordan River for use in Israel, began to dig canals to divert two Jordan tributaries, the Hasbani and Wazzani Springs. Israelis immediately shelled and destroyed both projects. The attacks by Syria, Egypt, and Jordan that eventually followed had many causes, but water remained a priority for both sides.²⁷¹

Ironically, the Jordan River, the blessed water of Jesus’ baptism is drying up. Commenting on the task of saving the river, Peter Schwartzstein says, “the great biblical waterway is little more than a shallow, unimposing trickle of sludge, a murky body of water that is in danger of withering into nothingness.”²⁷² Unfortunately, this time the Jordan’s drying is not about saving anyone, as it was in the Hebrew Scriptures; instead it causes death and destruction for many who depend on it. In the areas surrounding the Jordan River, as in other parts of the world, countries share water basins; when the available water is reduced conflict arises. The editors of *Earthcare* estimate, “at the present time, there are over two thousand treaties worldwide dealing with water basins, river flows, and water rights. Unfortunately, most of these treaties are inadequate or not respected.”²⁷³ It makes sense that, when people need water to survive, their commitment to an external treaty becomes

²⁷¹ Diane Raines Ward, *Water Wars: Drought, Flood, Folly and the Politics of Thirst* (New York: Riverhead Books, 2002) 188.

²⁷² Peter Schwartzstein, “Biblical Waters: Can the Jordan River Be Saved?” *National Geographic*, February 22, 2014, <http://news.nationalgeographic.com/news/2014/02/140222-jordan-river-syrian-refugees>.

²⁷³ David Clowney and Patricia Mosto, ed., *Earthcare: An Anthology in Environmental Ethics* (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, 2009) 468.

secondary to securing the necessary water. Treaties only serve their purpose to determine who has rights to the water if there is sufficient water to satisfy all partners.

Conflict over water rights is not particular to the Middle East, nor do they always become bodily aggressive. According to the Global Policy Forum, “more than fifty countries on five continents might soon be caught up in water disputes unless they move quickly to establish agreements on how to share reservoirs, rivers, and underground water aquifers.”²⁷⁴ Countries and individuals approach the water scarcity conflict in different ways, some much more insidious than armed conflict. Oil Baron T. Boone Pickens has led the charge in obtaining water rights to large bodies of water in order to control their use. CBS News reported Pickens efforts over the past fifteen years to acquire the rights to significant areas of Texas land that gives him control over vast amount of water. CBS says Pickens’ Mesa Water

owns the land that sits on top of the Ogallalla Aquifer, the largest aquifer in North America, which extends across eight states. Pickens wants to take that 200,000 acre feet and pipe it to Dallas, some 250 miles away. In short, it’s a bet that water will become scarce, and as a result, one valuable commodity... Basically this means that Pickens owns more water than any person in America.²⁷⁵

The United Nations and the Defense Intelligence Agency both report that water has indeed become a scarcity and, within twenty years, two-thirds of the planet’s residents will face life-threatening shortages. For those, like Pickens, who see water as a commodity this presents a great opportunity to profit from other’s need. For those who understand water

²⁷⁴ “Water in Conflict,” *Global Policy Forum*, nd, www.globalpolicy.org/security-council/dark-side-of-natural-resources-st.html.

²⁷⁵ Kirsten Korosec, “T. Boone Pickens: A Water Baron for the Twenty-First Century,” March 29, 2010, cbsnews.com/news/t.-boone-pickens-a-water-baron-for-the-twenty-first-century/.

access to be a human right, his actions are, at least unethical, and perhaps immoral.

Pickens, and other water barons, look at water scarcity and see opportunity, while those who suffer from lack of access to clean water – including children who are dying –hope for the right to drink, bathe in, and cook with the water that should be freely available to all.

This reality demonstrates the magnitude of the water crisis and lends support to a consideration of including our twenty-first century abuse of water within preparation programs for Baptism – that time within Christian faith life when we are most conscious of the role water plays in our relationship to divine life. The prayer offered by the Sisters of the Presentation of the Blessed Virgin Mary reminds people of the responsibility to afford all persons access to clean water:

Sustaining God, we turn to you in prayer, mindful of the world in which we live,
Where too many people lack the most basic source of life - clean water.

This is your world, created with water enough to meet every person's need, young and old, male and female, rich and poor. We pray for all those who have the power to make life-giving decisions, especially those who are responsible for managing and maintaining water systems, for community groups and partners seeking to restore the environment and the lives of poor people, and those who can make policies to protect the future of all people. May they find just solutions that ensure that every human being has clean water and adequate sanitation. God of life, God of all those who walk miles for water, God of those whose only supply is contaminated, bringing death, not life. May water, clean and life giving,

be available to every living creature. May that vision move forward. May your will be done. Amen.²⁷⁶

²⁷⁶ “Water and Faith,” *Union of Presentation Sisters*, World Water Day, March 22, 2014, Presentationsistersunion.org/news/view-article.cfm.

Chapter Four:

Water and the Sacrament of Baptism

From the depth – I came only to draw water
in a jug – so long ago, this brightness
still clings to my eyes – the perception I found,
and so much empty space, my own,
reflected in the well.

“Song of the Brightness of Water”

By Karol Wojtyla (Pope John Paul II)²⁷⁷

The Samaritan woman in the Gospel of John meets Jesus at the well, engages in a complex conversation with him, is promised living water, and hurries off to share the new life she has discovered with anyone who could see and hear her joy.²⁷⁸ The promised living water floods the woman’s spirit and overflows as she invites everyone she encounters on her way back to the city to go with her to see this marvelous person she met; so refreshed that she left her water jar at the well. Augustine reflects, “she threw away her water-pot then, which was no longer of use, but a burden to her, such was her avidity to be satisfied with that water.”²⁷⁹ The Samaritan woman encountered Jesus in a deeply meaningful way and was transformed. The brightness, of which Pope John Paul II speaks, opened her eyes to a new reality regarding the way she would live her life. It all started with water. As Linda J. Gibler recounts “the biblical traditions recognize two kinds of water: flowing,

²⁷⁷ “Karol Wojtyla /Song of the Brightness of Water,” *poetry dispatch and other notes from the underground*, April 17, 2008, <https://poetrydispatch.wordpress.com/2008/04/17/song-of-the-brightness-of-water-refrain>.

²⁷⁸ *The Holy Bible: Catholic Study Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011) John 4:1-30.

²⁷⁹ Augustine, *The Fathers of the Church*, (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008) 97.

living water; and stale water that collects in cisterns. While collected water is only fit for ordinary household purposes, living water participates in a greater mystery. Living water feeds streams, wells, and the sea. It rains from the vault of Heaven and swells up from the depths.”²⁸⁰ It is important to note that in some translations the well in the story of the Samaritan woman is identified as a spring,²⁸¹ discounting the dualism between well water and living water in some interpretations of the story.

As early as Augustine’s reflection on the woman at the well in which he teaches: “see how she understood living water, namely the water that was in that spring. You want to give me living water and I am carrying the means to draw it and you are not. Here is living water; how are you going to give it to me.”²⁸² Scripture scholars recognized there was no dichotomy between the water the woman offered Jesus and that which he offered her. Augustine confirms this as he says, “such was the water in that spring. Why then, did he promise her what he was asking for?”²⁸³ The answer for Augustine lies in Jesus’ words, “everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, but those who drink of the water that I will give will never be thirsty. The water that I will give will become in them a spring of water gushing up to eternal life.”²⁸⁴ How might people understand the spring of water in the passage? Augustine says, “That water which comes out of a spring is commonly called living water. For that which is collected from the rain in pools or cisterns is not called living water... but that is called living water which is taken flowing,”²⁸⁵ water that is alive

²⁸⁰ Linda J. Gibler, *Cosmocentric Sacramentality: Water, Oil, and Fire in the Roman Catholic Celebration of Baptism* (Ann Arbor, MI: Proquest Information and Learning Company, 2007) 45-46.

²⁸¹ *The Holy Bible: Catholic Study Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011).

²⁸² Augustine, *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008) 85.

²⁸³ *Ibid.*, 91.

²⁸⁴ *The Holy Bible: Catholic Study Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011) John 4: 13-14

²⁸⁵ Augustine, *The Fathers of the Church* (Washington, D.C.: The Catholic University of America Press, 2008) 85.

and moving, water that gushes. The good news Jesus offers the Samaritan woman as they are refreshed by the living water from the well opens her up to new possibilities for her life. She goes forth to share his revelation so that others may be awakened to the power of water that satisfies thirst once and for all. The waters of Baptism symbolize the living water Jesus promises – water that gushes up to eternal life; a symbol of the source of divine life that flows within the baptized person, gushing up in the Christian life that follows. How do symbols reveal meaning beyond their physical reality?

Symbol

A symbol functions as an intermediary between what is visible and that which lies beyond what eyes may see. Paul Ricoeur defines symbol as “any structure of signification in which a direct, primary, literal meaning designates, in addition, another meaning which is indirect, secondary, and figurative and which can be apprehended only through the first.”²⁸⁶ Every symbol has multiple meanings, but those meanings are dependent upon the initial physical reality of the symbol. Symbols are opaque or as Ricoeur expresses, “an enigma”²⁸⁷ that challenges the observer to look deeply into its core for meaningful appreciation of its message. Only then will symbols open themselves to interpretation. It is this process of interpreting that gives rise to the multiple meanings that creates a new and deeper sense of reality. Ricoeur says, “interpretation is the work of thought which consists in deciphering the hidden meaning in the apparent meaning, in unfolding the levels of meaning implied in the literal meaning.”²⁸⁸ Thus, interpreting symbols is a complex process that requires symbolic thinking. This type of thinking is a manifestation of the ambiguous

²⁸⁶ Paul Ricoeur, “Existence and Hermeneutics,” in *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974) 13.

²⁸⁷ Ibid.

²⁸⁸ Ibid.

nature of reality and of the world that is not available to the senses. Susan Ross defines ambiguity as “a condition marked by vagueness, a lack of clarity, even obscurity,²⁸⁹ but at the same time recognizes that as Susan Ross explains - “ambiguity can be a source of transformation and meaning.”²⁹⁰ Accepting ambiguity re-orient thinking to “an understanding of God and the world in dynamic relation...Ambiguity as expressive relates to the multiple ways in which deeper realities can be conveyed. So an appreciation of ambiguity will work against too great an emphasis on neat and clear distinctions in the expressive possibilities of the symbolic.”²⁹¹ Symbols open up the field of vision to allow for mystery, possibility, and a larger understanding of the reality people encounter, particularly when we are engaged in an experience of Divine interaction.

Although symbols are a form of sign, as Bernard Cooke argues that they “differ from simple signs because of the richness of consciousness they effect. They not only give us information and understanding; they touch our imaginations, emotions, desires, and loves and they trigger our decisions and our activity.”²⁹² While a sign is simplistic and, as Ross says, “bears a one-to-one relationship to its signifier,”²⁹³ a symbol has multivalent possibilities and responses. As Ricoeur explains, “they give rise to thought. They also give rise to feelings and strivings. Symbols, therefore, do not simply indicate as do mere signs. Rather, they make present what they symbolize. They are not imitations, but genuine instruments of reality. It is only by their agency that anything real becomes an object of

²⁸⁹ Susan A. Ross, *Extravagant Affections: A Feminist Sacramental Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1998) 65.

²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, 65

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, 56.

²⁹² Bernard Cooke, *Sacraments and Sacramentality* (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2006) 46.

²⁹³ Susan A. Ross, *Extravagant Affections: A Feminist Sacramental Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1998) 55.

intellectual apprehension and as such is made visible to us.”²⁹⁴ Joseph Martos explains this difference when he says: “signs tend to affect us simply and we tend to respond to them simply, but symbols tend to affect us complexly and we tend to respond to them complexly.”²⁹⁵ The complex response to symbols creates the ambiguity that comes from thinking symbolically; the clarity we look for will only be discovered within the mystery we encounter.

The world of symbols is both a wonder-full and frightening place - people lose their safe footing and enter a space that draws their entire being into a consciousness that awakens them to the macrocosm of their experience. The complex nature of symbols provides for this wider vision, a vision that deepens to include our subconscious awareness. Edward Schillebeeckz explains,

Within the experiential human consciousness, moreover, there is an active relationship between the subconscious (personal and collective) and reflective consciousness. This connection also gives a projective structure to the human consciousness that experiences. Within all *perception* of meaning we also project and symbolize. The symbolizing activity which takes place above all in experiences of transcendence does not occur primarily at the level of conscious reflection but at the threshold of the transition from sub-consciousness to consciousness. Apart from their own value as the visualizing of a transcendent reality, symbols, as the

²⁹⁴ Paul Ricoeur, “Existence and Hermeneutics,” in *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1974) 13.

²⁹⁵ Joseph Martos, *The Sacraments: An Interdisciplinary and Interactive Study* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009) 16.

metaphorical expression of a particular experience, connect explicit consciousness to the stream of the whole of our subconscious world.²⁹⁶

Symbols allow for visualization of a transcendent reality, a reality that would be inaccessible to the sense experience were it not for their intervention because they electrify the current that exists between our subconscious and conscious mind. Symbols light up experiences so that they become deeper and fuller as they take in images and sounds previously unknown to our consciousness. Thus, the power of symbols lies in their ability to expand our vision to see the unseen. Through nonverbal communication symbols speak of phenomenon, mystery, and the existence of a metaphysical world that can now be accessed through the human body. Susan Ross points out that

Although not verbal, symbols do in fact constitute a language, in that they are vehicles of expression, rooted in the body, culture and history. Symbols themselves participate in a world of meaning, dependent on cultural and historic context, as does language. ...human beings have no *unmediated* knowledge. *All* our knowledge is symbolic. All of it is mediated through our bodies, through sound, vision, touch, hearing, taste.²⁹⁷

Therefore, humans interpret symbols according to the experiential lens through which they look – the experiences that have framed their worldview. In this regard, the meaning of symbols is multivalent and, according to Mircea Eliade,

It is a drastic mistake to reduce a symbolic image to just one of its meanings. It is therefore the image as such, the whole bundle of meanings that is *true*, not any

²⁹⁶ Edward Schillebeeckx, *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckx: Volume 10: Church The Human Story of God* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014) 19.

²⁹⁷ Susan A. Ross, *Extravagant Affections: A Feminist Sacramental Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1998) 140.

one of its meanings, nor one alone of its many frames of reference. To translate an image into a concrete terminology by restricting it to any one of its frames of reference is to do worse than mutilate it – it is to annihilate to annul it as an instrument of cognition.²⁹⁸

Human experiences are the frames of reference through which people interpret the meaning of symbols and translate that meaning for the present moment; this is true for cultural and religious as well as personal interpretation of symbols. Symbols emerge and fade as persons, cultures, and religious beliefs change. Paul Tillich describes this phenomenon regarding symbols by noting that “they grow when the situation is ripe for them, and they die when the situation changes.”²⁹⁹ Since human life is never static, constantly refiguring itself through a variety of experiences, the meanings symbols convey adapt to the changing circumstances. At the same time, as Mary Catherine Hilker points out,

human persons do not have experience apart from some framework for understanding or perceiving. Human life is always in the context of the multiple traditions within which one stands, including personal history, family stories, ethnic roots and culture. New experiences may call for modification, change, or even rejection of previous horizons.³⁰⁰

Symbols provide the framework for human experience but also adapt to personal, cultural, and ethnic realities for the whole bundle of meanings Eliade asserts is necessary to maintain their integrity. This accounts for the complexity of symbols in that they are filtered through a myriad of experiences and function within those circumstances. Ross

²⁹⁸ Mircea Eliade, *Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism* (New York: Sheed and Ward, 1961) 15.

²⁹⁹ Paul Tillich, *Dynamics of Faith* (New York: Harper and Rowe, 1958), 43.

³⁰⁰ Mary Catherine Hilker, *Naming Grace* (New York, NY: Continuum Publishing Company, 1997) 52.

notes “the interpretation of symbol and metaphor has become a rich resource for contemporary theologians, not to mention philosophers, literary critics, and other scholars. The symbol is no longer a poor substitute for reality, but a profound source of manifold meaning.”³⁰¹ The meanings symbols offer provide access to a reality that is profoundly varied and rich. Water with its potential for multivalent interpretations, is just such a symbol; it speaks to seemingly contradictory experiences with one voice as the human person attempts to interpret its message.

Water: Symbol of Death and New Life

Cooke explains that “a human is a symbol-making being. From their earliest moments of human consciousness, humans are engaged in interpreting their experience through symbols, and no waking moment will be without the use of symbols.”³⁰² This may seem to be an exaggerated description of the significance of symbols until we consciously consider how often we see the world around us as a multitude of symbols. In poetry, art, science, and religion, language and pictures are used to represent those deeper more profound realities that defy simple words. At times the process is so subtle that the impact of the symbol has been absorbed before a conscious consideration of its function.

Creation acts as a powerful symbol of every emotion and desire humans experience; beautiful flowers evoke love, death, awe, sadness, joy and others, emerging from a person’s prior experiences in which flowers played a role. The same may be said for the sky, storms, the dirt of the earth and, most assuredly, water. As Molly Wolf argues,

Water is marvelously expressive stuff, full of deep meaning to all humankind, perhaps the most beautifully symbolic stuff of all. The water of life, the water of

³⁰¹ Susan A. Ross, *Extravagant Affections: A Feminist Sacramental Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1998) 61.

³⁰² Bernard Cooke, *Sacraments and Sacramentality* (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2006), 44.

baptism, the water that cleanses and heals, the water that breaks down and destroys, the water that lifts us and floats us when we come aground, the water that churns and pounds us out of our complacency and into awareness; the water of swamps and sloughs, and soggy despond, the roiling sea-ice powerfully sculpting a coast; soft groundwater tenderly upwelling to green a barren landscape; the singing chuckle of a creek, the roar of a fall, the calm assurance of a great river, the crash of a seaswell, the quiet privacy of fog, rain washing or slashing or downpouring, or falling gentle as a leaf; the soft healing or bitter springing, or joyful welling of salt tears... God be praised for the gift of water.³⁰³

It does seem that, particularly with water, every waking moment in which we encounter water in any of its many forms, we are face to face with the world of symbol. Religious experiences are laden with water as symbol which is as multi-dimensional as Wolf describes. Baptism is one of those experiences that rely upon water for meaning. From the baptisms in the River Jordan in Jewish history to the innumerable rituals that have occurred since, water is the indispensable symbol of God's saving power. The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* speaks of water in this way: "since the beginning of the world, water, so humble and wonderful a creature, has been the source of life and fruitfulness. Sacred Scripture sees it as 'overshadowed' by the Spirit of God."³⁰⁴ As the church enters the season of the resurrection of Jesus, she recalls the images of water in the scriptures from creation to the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River. The life of the Spirit in the waters of creation is expressed beautifully as the water is blessed during the Easter Vigil as the liturgy explains "at the very dawn of creation your Spirit breathed on the waters,

³⁰³ Molly Wolf, *Hiding in Plain Sight: Sabbath Blessings* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1998) 66.

³⁰⁴ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Liguori Publications: Liguori, MO, 1994) 313.

making them the wellspring of all holiness.”³⁰⁵ Water is a symbol of spiritual life just as it sustains physical life, but water is a complex symbol that points to both death and life. The Catechism continues with an understanding of water as a symbol with dualistic meaning. It explains that “if water springing up from the earth symbolizes life, the water of the sea is a symbol of death, and so can represent the mystery of the cross. By this symbolism Baptism signifies communion with Christ’s death”³⁰⁶ The water is seen as both life-giving and the cause of death and destruction in the first Jewish water story. In the Easter vigil water blessing, the Church recounts the scripture story of the Great Flood to express the reality of death to sin the water of Baptism conveys. “The waters of the great flood you made a sign of the waters of baptism that make an end of sin and a new beginning of goodness,”³⁰⁷ but the story also horrifically describes the destruction and death wrought by the same water that saved those who were on the ark:

The waters swelled so mightily on the earth that all the high mountains under the whole heaven were covered; the waters swelled above the mountains, covering them fifteen cubits deep. And all flesh died that moved on the earth, birds, domestic animals, wild animals, all swarming creatures that swarm on the earth, and all human beings.³⁰⁸

When the story is read in its entirety, water does emerge as a symbol of the new beginning of goodness but it also evokes fear of its power to destroy. Water becomes symbolic of the death/life reality inherent in Christian Baptism; dying with Jesus in his crucifixion, dying to a way of life that diminishes the good news Jesus shared, and dying to the isolation that fractures the well-being of the Christian community. Dying takes

³⁰⁵ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Roman Missal, Easter Vigil, www.migrate.usccb.org/prayer-and/the-mass/roman-missal, 44.

³⁰⁶ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Liguori Publications: Liguori. MO, 1994) 313.

³⁰⁷ United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, Roman Missal, Easter Vigil, www.migrate.usccb.org/prayer-and/the-mass/roman-missal, 44

³⁰⁸ *The Holy Bible: Catholic Study Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011) Genesis 7:19-21.

courage, but is implicit in the new beginning baptism offers; it awakens the Christian to the possibilities of a life lived in faith, hope and love in a community of believers who honor that death and resurrection are the promises of the sacrament. Baptismal water is a powerful symbol of this reality: The baptismal waters, like the waters of the deluge, destroy sin and its effects, but at the same time preserve the seed of new life. In the homilies and writings of the Fathers, Noah is compared to Christ, the ark to the Church, the dove to the Holy Spirit. The use of this reading during the former Easter Vigil testifies to the Church's fondness for this story as a type of baptism. As the great deluge of water recedes those saved in the ark return to dry land to begin again to live according to the covenant God deigned for the chosen people. But the memory of the death of all who perished must certainly have remained with them. Again, water has both saved and destroyed.

The second scripture story reflecting the meaning of water in the Christian experience of Baptism tells of the Israelites crossing the red sea. Camped by the sea with the Egyptians pursuing them, the Israelites feared God had abandoned them. Moses tells them to go forward into the threatening waters, that God would liberate them from their captors. Then Moses stretched out his hand over the sea. The Lord drove the sea back by a strong east wind all night, and turned the sea into dry land; and the waters were divided. The Israelites went into the sea on dry ground, the waters forming a wall for them on their right and on their left.³⁰⁹

As God had promised, the Israelites escaped the Pharaoh and his men by crossing through the sea waters to safety. But, as in the story of the Great Flood, many perished in these waters as the Egyptians pursued them. Again God tells Moses to:

³⁰⁹ *The Holy Bible: Catholic Study Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011) Exodus 14: 21-23.

Stretch out your hand over the sea, so that the water may come back upon the Egyptians, upon their chariots and chariot drivers. So Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at dawn the sea returned to its normal depth. As the Egyptians fled before it, the Lord tossed the Egyptians into the sea. The waters returned and covered the chariots and the chariot drivers, the entire army of Pharaoh that had followed them into the sea; not one of them remained.³¹⁰

This is a story of liberation for the Israelites whom the Egyptians attempted to enslave. But it is also included in the blessing of the water at the Easter vigil. What does it say to the Christian community during this most joyous time of the Church year as it celebrates the resurrection of Jesus; what is the message of liberation? The *Catechism of the Catholic Church* highlights the freedom Baptism offers by recalling the story - “but above all, the crossing of the Red Sea, literally the liberation of Israel from the slavery of Egypt, announces the liberation wrought by Baptism.”³¹¹ The blessing of the water announces, “you freed the children of Abraham from the slavery of Pharaoh, bringing them dry-shod through the waters of the Red Sea, to be an image of the people set free in baptism”³¹² Water, again, means life for some but death for others, framed within the context of liberation of the oppressed. God consistently acts as the agent of freedom. Thomas Groome asserts

The Hebrew Scriptures portray God as championing freedom. The great freedom story is Exodus, when God intervened in human history to free the Israelites from slavery in Egypt. In the New Testament, Jesus is represented as setting people free: from personal sin and social oppression, from hunger and fear, from closed-

³¹⁰ Ibid., Exodus: 14:26-28.

³¹¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Liguori. MO: Liguori Publications, 1994) 313.

³¹² Ibid., 1221.

mindedness and hard-heartedness, from hatred and despair, from sickness-spiritual, physical, emotional-and even from death.³¹³

This is the central message at the heart of not only the Exodus story but also the good news proclaimed by Jesus Christ and shared by his followers in the years following his resurrection. God is on the side of freedom for all God has created, especially all that is victim to hatred and oppression.

Liberation theology, first considered by Gustavo Gutierrez in 1968, addresses God's action on behalf of the poor and oppressed. Proposing a new paradigm for theology, Gutierrez articulated his preference for a theological model that takes seriously Christ's preaching and actions, raising up the marginalized of his world. According to Gutierrez, true "liberation" has three main dimensions: First, it involves political and social liberation, the elimination of the immediate causes of poverty and injustice. Second, liberation involves the emancipation of the poor, the marginalized, the downtrodden and the oppressed from all those things that limit their capacity to develop themselves freely and in dignity. Third, Liberation Theology involves liberation from selfishness and sin, a re-establishment of a relationship with God and with other people.³¹⁴

These conditions that determine the authenticity of liberation are a corollary to both the Exodus account of the crossing of the Red Sea and the Christian belief regarding Baptism. The effect of the sacrament is freedom from the selfishness and sin that impedes both full human development and a relationship with God and the community nourished by faith,

³¹³ Thomas H. Groome, *What Makes Us Catholic: Eight Gifts For Life* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins, 2002) 62.

³¹⁴ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1973)

hope, and love. In its commentary on the sacrament, *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* teaches “Baptism frees people from sin, gives them rebirth as God’s children, incorporates them into Christ’s Church, and grants them a share in his mission”³¹⁵ This teaching is consistent with the true liberation Gutierrez identifies – rebirth as God’s children instills in the baptized a desire to live fully as God intends, participating in Christ’s mission to seek justice for the poor and marginalized.

Baptism, thus, recalls the dangerous memory of the death and resurrection of Jesus, a memory that is at the heart of the Christian call to participate in the mission he began. The danger of the memory lies in the responsibility that comes with accepting initiation into Christ’s Church and Christ’s mission through the profession of faith included in the Baptism ritual. One of the questions the presider asks of the parents and godparents, “Do you believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord, who was born of the virgin Mary, was crucified, died and was buried, rose from the dead, and is now seated at the right hand of the Father,”³¹⁶ asks for a response that avows a belief in the totality of the life of Jesus Christ. Johann Baptist Metz explains that

It is in faith that Christians actualize the *memoria passionis, mortis, et resurrectionis Jesu Christi*. They faithfully remember the testament of his love, in which God’s dominion among men and women appeared precisely in the fact that the dominion that human beings exercise over one another began to be pulled down, that Jesus declared himself to be on the side of the invisible ones, those

³¹⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Liguori. MO: Liguori Publications, 1994) 312.

³¹⁶ *Rite of Baptism of a Child* (Milwaukee, WI: International Committee on English in the Liturgy, 1969) 10.

who are rejected and oppressed, and in so doing announced to them God's coming dominion as the liberating power of an unconditional love.³¹⁷

The story of the crossing of the Red Sea demonstrates God's desire to destroy the dominion that human beings exercise over one another and to liberate the oppressed from the burden of enslavement; we see the same theme in the passion, death, and resurrection of Jesus. He took on the suffering of the people of his time, was crucified because of his commitment, and rose from the dead, raising up with him all who were oppressed. This is the dangerous memory Baptism recalls, the memory that sparks a faith commitment to continue the liberating practice foundational to Christianity. Elizabeth Johnson, in her consideration of Mary, the mother of Jesus, reflects on the meaning of dangerous memory as she explains:

As with every critical memory, remembrance of the crucified and risen Christ is "dangerous" in a very particular way. Since God sided with this victim of unjust persecution rather than with his judges, this memory subverts the expectation that the powerful will always win. Instead, God is in solidarity with those who suffer, galvanizing hope for salvation. This creates a moral and social force that propels the church out of passivity into active engagement on behalf of all those in agony, in particular those brought low by human injustice. The effective power of this memory with its hope in the future, promised but unknown, has sustained the church's efforts to live with passion and compassion in the world, and continues to do so even now.³¹⁸

³¹⁷ Johann Baptist Metz, *Faith in History and Society: Toward a practical Fundamental Theology* (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 2007) 88-89.

³¹⁸ Elizabeth Johnson, *Truly Our Sister: A Theology of Mary in the Communion of Saints* (New York: Continuum, 2003) 320.

This passionate and compassionate way of life is the commitment baptized persons make when they profess faith in the death and resurrection of Jesus. Campbell comments:

The Israelites had crossed through the waters on their way to becoming God's people through the Sinai covenant; so also the Christian by baptism crosses through the waters and enters the new covenanted people of God, the Church. The Israelites, freed from Egypt, were set on their way to the promised land; so the Christian through baptism is set on his way to heaven, the eternal land of promise.³¹⁹

In the three stories contained within the Easter Vigil blessings, the Church relates the rich symbolism of water; from creation to the Great Flood to the crossing of the Red Sea, the blessing of baptismal water has symbolized the spiritual journey from life to death and finally to the ultimate freedom in eternal life. Bernard Cooke comments on this symbolism when he says:

Pointing to the death and resurrection of Jesus, water is a natural symbol. In situations such as a storm at sea, water unmistakably speaks of death; in situations such as the growing of crops, water just as clearly signifies life. But during the history of Israel water acquired a rich symbolism that sprang from the people's crossing of the waters when they fled Egypt....So a convert to Judaism was baptized to supply for the fact that his ancestors had not passed through Exodus waters.³²⁰

These three Hebrew Testament stories best relate the symbolism in the religious ritual blessing of the water at the Easter Vigil, recalling why the Baptism we celebrate in the

³¹⁹ Maura Campbell, "Water, Life, Death, and Christian Baptism," *Dialogue and Alliance* 4(1) 56.

³²⁰ Bernard Cooke, *Sacraments and Sacramentality* (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 2006) 143.

Catholic Church today is rooted in the Jewish journey from creation to their freedom from slavery. Commenting on the significance of this symbolism in the Jewish stories Monika Hellwig asserts,

Israel has, through the ages, baptized converts who have come from among the nations seeking membership in Israel as the People of God. In such a baptism the newcomer recapitulates in his person, in a dramatic reenactment, the sacred history of Israel. He is immersed bodily in waters symbolizing the primeval chaos, the flood-time wickedness of men, the bondage of Egypt, and the River Jordan that bars the way to the Promised Land. Symbolically, he goes through the passage from death to life which the people have made so many times.³²¹

Just as these stories became the backdrop for converts to Judaism, they continue today to offer the death to life symbolism for Baptism in the Catholic Church. Hellwig, like Cooke, looks to the story of the Red Sea to unveil the Christian sense of the movement from death to life, describing the “history of the Christian custom of baptizing and the Christian explanation of the action. In the New Testament the apostolic community makes it quite clear that entrance to the community is by baptism into the death and resurrection of Jesus.”³²² It is Jesus’ passing from death on the cross to resurrection, reflective of the Jewish people passing from slavery to freedom as they crossed the Red Sea, that assures the Christian of new life in Christ through Baptism. As Cooke points out “the symbol of water Baptism points also to Christ’s incorporation of this person into his new risen

³²¹ Monika Hellwig, *The Meaning of the Sacraments* (Dayton, OH: Pflaum Press, 1981) 8.

³²² *Ibid.*, 9.

existence.”³²³ Paul, in *Romans*, reveals the early Church recognition of the death/life experience through Baptism:

Do you not know that all of us who have been baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death? Therefore, we have been buried with him by baptism into death, so that, just as Christ was raised from the dead by the glory of the Father, so we too might walk in the newness of life.³²⁴

For the Jewish people, the new life did not begin when they reached the other side of the Red Sea; crossing the Jordan River was ahead of them. God had promised Moses and his people entrance into the Promised Land where their suffering would be abated; their new life would begin. However, it was not until Moses died – forty years after crossing the Red Sea – that the Land was in sight. God said: “my servant Moses is dead. Now proceed to cross the Jordan, you and all this people, into the land that I am giving to them, to the Israelites.”³²⁵ Continuing the theme of God’s power on behalf of God’s people, as the people followed the ark of the covenant into the river “the waters flowing from above stood still rising up in a single heap,”³²⁶ allowing the Israelites to cross over. They walked into the new life promised them nearly a half-century earlier. This same Jordan River was the site for the Baptism of Jesus who, following his immersion, went forth to proclaim the Good News that offered eternal life to all who followed his way. Christian belief in a life after this earthly one ends is rooted in the resurrection of Jesus and Christ’s promise of eternal life: “Jesus said to her, I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in me will

³²³ Ibid.,144.

³²⁴ *The Holy Bible: Catholic Study Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011) Romans 6:1-4.

³²⁵ Ibid., Joshua 1:2

³²⁶ Ibid., Joshua 3:16

live, even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die.”³²⁷ For Christians, the promise of eternal life begins in the waters of Baptism and remains throughout their lives through the gift of Divine grace, freely given by God to all who would receive it. The biblical theme of water allows for these conclusions. Maura Campbell explains that

the first conclusion is an admonition, a caution, not to ignore the deep significance of a natural resource which is so often taken for granted. The rich theme of water that threads its way so consistently through sacred history can only too readily be minimized in such a milieu, where water is so easily obtainable from the nearest faucet. However, the critical problem of water pollution in so many lakes and streams may once again alert humans to the value and necessity of this great life resource.³²⁸

It is not surprising the sacred scriptures are filled with water stories that reveal the power and saving actions of God as water is a natural symbol of the presence of God in all that God created. Water, though simply observed, is so complex in the multiple ways it speaks of the transcendent mystery within and among us. Water, the most abundant element in the world, reveals the divine through its power, its beauty, and its ability to nurture, satisfy, renew, and save. Should one ever doubt the giftedness of this symbol Annie Dillard paints a magnificent picture of its power and beauty, of its effect on the human mind and body and of its ability to remind us of what it means to live in the presence of God. She writes,

What does it feel like to be alive? Living, you stand under a waterfall. You leave the sleeping shore deliberately; you shed your dusty clothes, pick your barefoot

³²⁷ Ibid., John 11:25-26

³²⁸ Maura Campbell, “Symbol and Reality: Water, Life, Death, and Christian Baptism” *Dialogue and Alliance* 4(1), 48-60.

way over the high slippery rocks, hold your breath, choose your footing, and step into the waterfall. The hard water pelts your skull, bangs in bits on your shoulders and arms. The strong water dashes down beside you and you feel it along your calves and thighs rising roughly backup, up to the roiling surface, full of bubbles that slide up your skin or break on you at full speed. Can you breathe here? Here where the force is the greatest and only the strength of your neck holds the river out of your face. Yes, you can breathe even here.³²⁹

The sense of being alive in a world that, too often, speaks of oppression, suffering, and death is the gift water offers when we are able to appreciate it and to interpret it in the way Dillard describes; this interpretation is grace-filled. Water as symbol, interpreted through the lens grace provides, allows the human person to push aside the curtain that obscures a vivid sense of divine presence and live fully in relationship with that presence.

Water: Symbol of Grace

The blessing of the water at the Easter vigil begins with the prayer, “Father, you give us grace through sacramental signs, which tell us the wonders of your unseen power. In baptism, we use your gift of water which you have made a rich symbol of the grace you give us in this sacrament.”³³⁰ It is certainly noteworthy that the prayer acknowledges it is God who has made water a symbol of grace, divine grace flowing from the baptismal water to the life of the individual and the community it bathes. Elaine Ramshaw notes that

Water is pure grace. As a symbol of divine grace it is hard to beat. It comes down from above and wells up from beneath, giving life to the earth and all that grows on the earth. It is the medium of life’s beginnings, in which we all floated before

³²⁹ Annie Dillard, *An American Childhood* (New York: Perennial Library, 1988) 150.

³³⁰ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Liguori Publications: Liguori. MO, 1994) 313.

birth; we ourselves are mostly water. Water is a symbol of the givenness of nature, which precedes us and on which we depend. It is thus an appropriate symbol for the act of grace which initiates us into the body of Christ and the life of God.³³¹

As symbol, water nourishes the human appetite to come to know God through the senses. Because humans only experience the divine through body, symbols like water that they can see, touch, hear, and taste, are powerful mediums to allow humans to know Spirit. Water becomes not only a physical reality but also a connection between our body and the divine presence that lives both within and outside our sensual experience. Rituals that use water as symbol allow for this union between the human and divine. Cooke explains,

When rituals put participants in touch with sacred realities, the objects and actions within the ritual get perceived as sacred and special. In the Catholic sacraments, for example, ordinary objects such as water, oil, bread and wine and ordinary actions such as touch become holy by being taken up into ritual actions.”³³²

Sacramental symbols have the power to intimately connect moments of religious significance to the lived experiences that are at the core of human existence. Cooke continues to explain the effect of sacramental symbols, “they not only give us information and understanding; they touch our imaginations, emotions, desires and loves and they trigger our decisions and activities.”³³³ Water is a life-sustaining symbol and, therefore, mediates the divine presence through ritual words and actions. Additionally, it becomes not

³³¹ Elaine Ramshaw, Don S. Browning, ed. *Ritual and Pastoral Care: Theology and Pastoral Care*, (Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress Press, 1987) 106.

³³² Bernard Cooke, *Sacraments and Sacramentality* (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1994), 46.

³³³ *Ibid.*, 46.

only a symbol of the sacred but sacred in its own right. takes on the sacred character of that which it signifies.

The prophet Isaiah recognized the sacredness of water and the promise of God's saving action as God speaks of his plans to do great things for the people using water as evidence of his sustaining presence: "I am about to do a new thing; now it springs forth, do you not perceive it? I will make a way in the wilderness and rivers in the desert. The wild animals will honor me, the jackals and the ostriches; for I give water in the wilderness, rivers in the desert, to give drink to my chosen people."³³⁴ All creation will honor God when it partakes of the precious water, the sacred symbol of God's continuing presence, the symbol of grace God pours out on all whom God has created. Should one ever doubt the power and beauty.

Amazing Grace Bestowed as Gift

Amazing Grace, so sweet the sound that saved a wretch like me!

I once was lost, but now am found, was blind but now I see.

Twas grace that taught my heart to fear. And grace, my fears relieved.

How precious did that grace appear the hour I first believed.³³⁵

John Newton

The word *grace* is understood in a variety of ways. *The Merriam Webster Dictionary* defines it in relation to movement and behavior— "a way of moving that is smooth and attractive and that is not stiff or awkward; a controlled, polite, and pleasant way of behaving,"³³⁶ The dictionary explains, the word "derives from the Greek, *charis*. In

³³⁴ *The Holy Bible: Catholic Study Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011) Isaiah 43:19-20.

³³⁵ "Amazing Grace Lyrics," May 15, 2015, www.lyricsmode.com/lyrics/a/amazing_grace.html.

³³⁶ "grace" Merriam-Webster.com. May 8, 2011 <http://merriam-webster.com>.

secular Greek *charis* was related to *chario*, “to rejoice.”³³⁷ It is revealing that the identification of grace in many and diverse ways speaks to the possibilities inherent in this concept.

Grace takes on meaning in both a secular and religious context. The 1996 film *Breaking the Waves* develops the theme of God’s awareness of human persons as we struggle with life’s challenges. In his review of this film Roger Ebert writes, “breaking the Waves is emotionally and spiritually challenging, hammering at conventional morality with the belief that God not only sees all but understands a great deal more than we give him credit for. It tells the story of Bess, a simple woman of childlike naiveté, who sacrifices herself to sexual brutality to save the life of the man she loves.”³³⁸ Commenting on Ebert’s review Andrew Greeley relates his analysis to God’s saving grace always available to all who suffer. Greeley describes the film as “A story about the ubiquity and implacability of God’s saving grace...a parable of grace superabundant, of a loving God who stands by us always, just as he promised Bess he would do.”³³⁹ The worlds of film, music, and literature reveal the dynamic experience of grace. According to the popular Christian hymn, grace saves through faith and both evokes and relieves fear. It describes grace as a sensual experience – one that can be heard, seen, and felt, and sustains and supports us throughout the trials and terrors of life. Grace does not eliminate suffering or isolate people from the trauma of life’s challenges; instead, Phillip Yancey compares grace to water: “grace, like water, flows to the lowest part.”³⁴⁰ In so doing it restores the energy that dissipates in the midst of struggles. But grace is dynamic and powerful. In David Crowder’s spiritual *How*

³³⁷ Ibid.

³³⁸ Roger Ebert, “Breaking the Waves,” April 27, 2015, Rogerebert.com/reviews/breaking-the-waves-1996

³³⁹ Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 2000) 163-166.

³⁴⁰ Phillip Yancey, *goodreads*, April 28, 2015, www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/9204.

He Loves grace is like an ocean – “Drawn to redemption by the grace in His eyes, if His grace is an ocean, we’re all sinking. And heaven meets earth like an unforeseen kiss, and my heart turns violently inside of my chest. I don’t have time to maintain these regrets”³⁴¹

The force of this imagery reveals the power grace has to lift us up from experiences that, otherwise, might weigh us down. Sinking into the ocean of God’s grace, strangely, does not lead to death; it brings us to union with the divine that is experienced as a kiss from one who loves unconditionally.

Biblically, grace appears one hundred fifty-six times in the New Testament.

However, grace is not an abstract concept unrelated to human experience. In fact, Mary Catherine Hilkert proposes, “signs of grace are to be found everywhere if one has eyes to see.”³⁴² *see* grace with the eyes of faith; recognize it as the force which enables people to act in the spirit of God’s unconditional love. Karl Rahner teaches, “Grace is *here*. It is present wherever we are. It can always indeed be seen by the eye of faith and be expressed by the word of the message.”³⁴³ The human person cooperates with God’s freely-given gift of grace, becoming more human and more capable of love.

Grace present in the world transforms existence in ways that allow the divine to be truly present within creation. Joseph Martos says, “Not long ago it was important to distinguish sharply between the natural and the supernatural... Today, however, it seems more appropriate to speak of grace within the world, the divine incarnate in the human.”³⁴⁴

It is precisely this grace, which is always present, alive in daily activity, and a force

³⁴¹ David Crowder, “how he loves,” April 28, 2015, www.metrolyrics.com/how-he-loves-david-crowder.

³⁴² Mary Catherine Hilkert, *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination* (New York: Continuum, 1997) 32.

³⁴³ Karl Rahner, “Priest and Poet,” in *Theological Investigations*, vol. 3, trans. Karl-H and Boniface Kruger (Baltimore, MD: Helicon, 1967) 313.

³⁴⁴ Joseph Martos, *The Sacraments: An Interdisciplinary and Interactive Study* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009) 59.

supporting desire for loving behavior, that is freely given by God anticipating our human response. Cooke says this grace “is the transformation of individuals and communities at the deepest level of their being and meaning. It is also a transformation of their finality, their basic destiny... This unexpected and undeserved gift of divine friendship transforms and the experience and the lives of people, and invites them toward new life.”³⁴⁵ Grace affects both the individual and the communities they impact as a consequence of becoming transformed into grace-filled persons capable of extending love to those we encounter. However, grace is not an other-worldly experience of transcendent mystery but is realized through ways that are essentially human. Hilkert explains, “Because human beings are essentially embodied and social, grace as the spiritual mystery at the heart of reality has to be manifested in concrete, historical, visible ways.”³⁴⁶ Thomas Aquinas’ theology of the sacraments expresses this truism: “it is part of man’s nature to acquire knowledge of the intelligible from the sensible.”³⁴⁷ Sacraments are opportunities to *know* the grace that reveals God’s presence and makes visible the invisible.

Sacraments and Grace

This gift of grace is present within the sacramental life of the Church. For much of Church history grace was divided into two categories – sanctifying grace or actual grace –Cooke identifies “the former being the re-orientation and elevation of our basic human nature and the latter being the special assistance given our moral actions,”³⁴⁸ as if God’s free gift was bestowed from outside the person. This understanding fails to consider the

³⁴⁵ Bernard Cooke, *Sacraments and Sacramentality* (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1994) 230, 224.

³⁴⁶ Mary Catherine Hilkert, *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination* (New York: Continuum, 1997) 47.

³⁴⁷ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theological* (Vatican City: Benziger Brothers Printers to the Holy Apostolic See, 1917).

³⁴⁸ Bernard Cooke, *Sacraments and Sacramentality* (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1994) 58.

divine self-gift. Cooke comments, “While God is distinct from us, the reality of divine self-giving happens within our consciousness through God’s presence to each of us.”³⁴⁹ Grace is not delivered, it is already present in the divine-human relationship; people do not acquire it through mediated actions, they recognize it in God’s loving presence. Cooke proposes, “the reality of this relationship, as we increasingly accept it, provides a wisdom to guide us in the important decisions that shape our personhood and identity.”³⁵⁰ People continue to grow in the grace God freely gives to humans when they respond to the divine presence within us, when we mature in the life of faith we profess as followers of Jesus the Christ. Human experience is fertile ground that gives rise to a response to grace; Schillebeeckz notes, “in our human experiences we can *experience* something that transcends our experience and proclaims itself in that experience as unexpected grace.”³⁵¹ Schillebeeckx words reveal how startling awakening to the grace God has gifted can be; it appears to be beyond the experience and yet, is intrinsic to it. This is the wonder of grace – it seems to arrive unexpectedly and yet it is always here. Therefore, do sacraments give grace? Is there grace that is available only through participation in sacraments? Bernard Cooke answers this poetically:

Insofar as Christian rituals celebrate an active life of charity, they give us grace. Insofar as Christian rituals strengthen the sick, pardon sinners, heal the broken, they give grace. Insofar as they celebrate and strengthen the Christian commitment to a life of maturation in selfless love, they give grace. Insofar as

³⁴⁹ Ibid., 226.

³⁵⁰ Ibid.

³⁵¹ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Christ: The Experience of Jesus as Lord*, (New York: Crossroad, 1981) 29.

they celebrate and support a loving friendship and caring family, they give grace.³⁵²

Sacraments, thus, become occasions for human persons to respond to the divine presence God has gifted; they are signs of God's abiding love for the sick, sinners, and the broken. They empower Christians to practice the love Jesus revealed through his death and resurrection, and they awaken persons to the love and compassion relationships demand. The indwelling grace gifted by God is the seed that blossoms into a flowering of the Christian life ready to respond to God's gratuitous love.

Sacraments are both signs and causes of grace. Aquinas explains this reality when he writes, "a thing is said to be in another in various ways; in two of which grace is said to be in the sacraments. First, as in its sign; for a sacrament is a sign of grace. Secondly, as in its cause; for, as stated above (A 1) a sacrament of the New Law is an instrumental cause of grace."³⁵³ Theologians before and since Aquinas have argued the meaning and function of grace within sacramental theology. Edward Kilmartin says:

Catholic theology tends to consider the personal self-communication of the Trinity in the Spirit as the uncreated grace which is the essential basis for the whole of the human being's grace-given endowment. From this point of view, actual grace is simply the self-communication of God in its dynamic aspect of seeking to evoke the free response of the human being... Grace events, which occur at definite points of

³⁵² Ibid., 52.

³⁵³ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theological* (Vatican City: Benziger Brothers Printers to the Holy Apostolic See, 1917).

space and time, are the historical acceptance of God's own communication of self by which the personal union between the human being and the divine is realized.³⁵⁴

Sacraments are the grace events that provide for the union that Crowder in his hymn describes as the unforeseen kiss when heaven meets earth. God's self-communication is realized within the sacramental experience that illuminates divine presence in the sacred moment.

In the thirteenth century Aquinas argued that "sacraments are necessary because human beings need signs for communication: we communicate to others and receive their communications to us only through the medium of signs."³⁵⁵ Since it is not possible to meet God face-to-face signs provide the possibility for humans to communicate with God. Martos agrees with Aquinas in his assessment of the necessity of signs. He writes "if therefore we are to receive God's communication to us, it must come through signs."³⁵⁶ Symbols are indispensable in religious ritual in that they introduce the participants to the sacred meanings of the experience. He also explains that "Catholic rituals are valid human ways of entering into those meanings, reaffirming them, and deepening one's understanding of them. Rituals are not escapes from life but intensifications of it."³⁵⁷ They deepen the human person's relationship to God and to the community. Martos explains, "religious ritual can be said to symbolically articulate the shared religious experience of a community by putting into words and gestures what it understands about itself, about

³⁵⁴ Edward J. Kilmartin, "Theology of the Sacraments: Toward a New Understanding of the Chief Rites of the Church of Jesus Christ" in *Alternative Futures for Worship*, edited by Regis A. Duffy (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1987) 130-131.

³⁵⁵ Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Theological* (Vatican City: Benziger Brothers Printers to the Holy Apostolic See, 1917).

³⁵⁶ Joseph Martos, *The Sacraments: An Interdisciplinary and Interactive Study* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009) 239.

³⁵⁷ Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church* (Liguori, MO: Liguori/Triumph, 2001) 16.

individuals, and about the relation of both to the transcendent.”³⁵⁸ Water is a dynamic symbol of the mutual communication that takes place between God and humans within sacramental rituals and, therefore, points to the transcendent in a substantial way. Martos continues, “Rituals which involve the use of water often signify life and growth, or cleansing and purification. In myths about the creation of the world, water is sometimes pictured as the element out of which other things are formed, for water itself is formless and all living things have liquid in them.”³⁵⁹ Religion and water are so intermingled that sacramental rituals bring their relationship into focus, revealing how both are forces for an experience of the divine who is the subject of religion and the creative energy within water.

The Sacrament of Baptism

Martos describes this effect of Baptism as “they put on a new humanity and become a new creation, reborn by water and the Spirit, children of God, dead to sin and alive in Christ.”³⁶⁰ His description reflects the image of the Samaritan woman who, too, was reborn - alive to Christ following her encounter with him at the well. Martos continues:

fundamentally, then, baptism remains a door to the sacred for most Catholics because it is still a ritual through which they enter a religious society which stands for a sacred meaning of life and which opens the way to experiences of the sacred in childhood, adolescence, and adulthood. For parents and others who attend baptismal ceremonies, the ritual can in addition disclose dimensions of their

³⁵⁸ Joseph Martos, *The Sacraments: An Interdisciplinary and Interactive Study* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009) 48.

³⁵⁹ Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred: A Historical Introduction to Sacraments in the Catholic Church* (Liguori, MO: Liguori/Triumph, 2001) 12.

³⁶⁰ Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 2001) 176.

religious beliefs which are sometimes obscured, and can deepen their commitment to what they discover through their participation in it.³⁶¹

As Martos explains, the opening of the door to the sacred – an enlightened vision of life - happens for all who are open to the divine gift that is present within the sacrament. This description reflects Pope John Paul II's poem – “so long ago, this brightness still clings to my eyes – the perception I found,” and recalls the Samaritan woman at the well, who, after meeting Jesus, awakened to the sacredness of her own life. Meeting Jesus in baptism is awakening to the possibilities of a blessed life in communion with the sacred.

Christian Baptism has been addressed by scholars since the beginnings of the Church, following the ascension of Jesus to heaven. The *Book of Acts* and Paul's letters contain numerous references to Baptism. Other than the scriptures, one of the earliest writings describing Baptism is found in the *Didache* – a collection of manuscripts discovered by Philotheos Bryennios in 1873 in the Library of the Most Holy Sepulcher at Constantinople. Although scholars do not agree on the exact date of this writing, most accept it was written between 80 and 160 AD.³⁶² These remarkable writings contain much instruction regarding Church practices, including the celebration of Baptism;

The procedure for baptizing is as follows. After repeating all that has been said, immerse in running water "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." If no running water is available, immerse in ordinary water. This should be cold if possible; otherwise warm. If neither is practicable, then pour water

³⁶¹ Ibid., 181.

³⁶² See Joel D. Leyrer, “Baptism in the Early Church (Pentecost to 325 AD),” Minnesota District Spring Pastoral Council, Petra Lutheran Church, Sauk Rapids, MN, April 16-17, 1996.

three times on the head "In the Name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost."³⁶³

The preference for running water contrasted with ordinary water is suggestive, again, of the blessedness of living water within the ritual. The pouring of water on the head was a last resort, but would suffice if necessary. Today, many baptisms are celebrated in this way rather than immersion into living water. Is this method less instructive of the dynamic process the sacrament initiates and, if so, does it limit the potential to appreciate the relationship between the water of Baptism and the Earth's water?

Martos comments that, in the second century, the slight change from total immersion to allowing the pouring of water affected the understanding of the ritual; "the ritual itself was understood more in terms of washing and regeneration than in terms of death and resurrection."³⁶⁴ In the Age of the Patriarchs (100–500 AD) Church fathers emphasized the regenerative power of Baptism but did not discount its association with the death and resurrection of Jesus. The regeneration of the baptized, rising up from the baptismal waters as Jesus rose from the tomb, is reflective of the death and resurrection of Jesus. Martos explains, "although at the height of the patristic period the ritual washing was usually done by pouring water over candidate standing in a pool of water"³⁶⁵ for infant Baptisms in the western church "immersion came to be replaced by pouring water over the head of the child."³⁶⁶ Even though water continued to be the indispensable symbol for Baptism, the manner in which it was used altered the sense of the symbol, in that pouring a small amount of water over the head of the candidate, rather than full immersion in it, does

³⁶³"The Didache: The Teaching of Twelve Apostles," April 7, 2015, www.instituteofcatholicculture.org

³⁶⁴ Joseph Martos, *Doors to the Sacred* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 2001) 151.

³⁶⁵Ibid., 159.

³⁶⁶Ibid.

not allow for a total body experience. Although this practice continues to be the most accepted manner for infant Baptism, adult baptisms in some Catholic communities have restored immersion as the preferred form. In both, the use of water as the symbol of the creative power of God to regenerate and call into union all who are baptized recalls the Baptism of Jesus which revealed God's pleasure in the baptized.

Baptism for the Individual

And when Jesus had been baptized,
just as he came up from the water,
suddenly the heavens were opened to him
and he saw the Spirit of God
descending like a dove
and alighting on him.
And a voice from heaven said
This is my Son, the Beloved
With whom I am well pleased.³⁶⁷

This is the model for the meaning of Baptism – the Spirit of God touching the baptized as God expresses pleasure for the life of that person. This has been addressed in a multitude of ways by theologians and scholars in the Catholic Church. The Catholic Catechism calls Baptism “the basis of the whole Christian life, the gateway to life in the Spirit,”³⁶⁸ consistent with Martos’ image of the door to the sacred. According to the *Catechism*, when the baptismal water is blessed, “the Church asks God that through his Son the power of the Holy Spirit may be sent upon the water, so that those who will be baptized in it may be

³⁶⁷ *The Holy Bible: Catholic Study Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011) Matthew 3:16-17.

³⁶⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1994) 312.

born of water and the Spirit.”³⁶⁹ The Church expresses its belief that the Spirit is present in the water and, through Baptism, in the life of the baptized.

Pope Francis speaks of the action of the Holy Spirit in Baptism as he says, “in Baptism we are consecrated by the Holy Spirit. The word ‘Christian’ means this, it means to be consecrated like Jesus, in the same Spirit in which Jesus was immersed in his whole earthly existence.”³⁷⁰ Every Christian Baptism calls forth followers of Jesus to open the door to the sacred and to become immersed in the life of the Spirit of God. Osborne explains, “moreover, in the case of baptism, it is not a part of the human person, one’s mind, one’s will, one’s soul (if we think in a body-soul mentality), one’s body that is baptized; it is the total person. I say, ‘I am baptized,’ not ‘I have a soul that is baptized.’ Baptism affects my entire being and in its most radical depths.”³⁷¹ Thus, the whole person becomes immersed in the Spirit, as did Jesus when he came up from the water. Campbell proposes, “just as God gave order and direction to the primeval water chaos, so in baptism God's power orients the newborn Christian to a well-ordered life under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. It was the spirit of God who hovered over the primeval waters in the first place; now that divine influence is present again to make water powerful for new life in the Christian.”³⁷²

Baptism for the Community

Baptism’s immersion in the life of the Spirit is for the benefit of the community that participates in the ritual as much as it is for the individual being baptized. A person is

³⁶⁹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1994) 317.

³⁷⁰ Pope Francis, “Pope’s Homily at Mass on the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord,” January 11, 2015, https://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/homilies/2015/documents/papafrancesco_2015011_omelia-battesimo-signore.html.

³⁷¹ Kenan B. Osborne, *The Christian Sacraments of Initiation: baptism, Confirmation, Eucharist* (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1987) 91.

³⁷² Maura Campbell, “Water, Life, Death, and Christian Baptism,” *Dialogue and Alliance* 4(1) 49.

initiated into a relationship with God that spills over into the community of faith in which she/he belongs. The individual then becomes a vital member of the Church that brings together the people of God to honor and celebrate God among Christians. Martos addresses the community nature of baptism when he says:

baptism is a sacrament of initiation, bringing incorporation into the church and separation from the sinfulness that contaminates the world, and bestowing the basic gifts of faith, hope, and love. As a parish community we can ask ourselves: To what extent are we a recognizable community into which the ritual action marks a real initiation? Do we truly incorporate that infant or adult into our common life? Will those who are baptized be any freer from sin than if they had not been baptized? How do they receive faith, hope, and love from the other members of the community?³⁷³

The questions Martos poses are critical to appreciating the full effect of the sacrament. If the awareness of the gift Baptism offers fades once the baptized leaves the ritual both the individual and the community suffer. The person needs the community to support the faith life initiated through the sacrament and the Church needs the gifts and graces each person brings to the community. Baptism is not a washed and done experience; it is the beginning of a shared faith that builds up the church that becomes the sacred space where faith, hope, and love abide. The Baptism ritual is the entrance into this space. Martos describes this shared faith: “religious ritual can be said to symbolically articulate the shared religious experience of a community by putting into words and gestures what it understands

³⁷³ Joseph Martos, *The Sacraments: An Interdisciplinary and Interactive Study* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009) 234-235.

about itself, about individuals, and about the relation of both to the transcendent.”³⁷⁴ Just as any relationship requires commitment, openness, and communication, the tri-fold union between God, person, and community begun in the Baptism ritual is realized and expressed when the baptized and the Church come together to profess and carry out the mission of Jesus Christ.

As the basic sacrament of Christian initiation, baptism has an inescapable ecclesial meaning. As with confirmation its meaning was for a long time privatized so that it was looked at as a means of individual salvation, but even then it was baptism *into the church* that was seen as making salvation available. Initiation into the church means incorporation in the body of Christ and hence into his death and resurrection, symbolized in the ancient rite by actual immersion into and reemergence from the baptismal waters. This sacrament therefore symbolized the fact that what we as Christians call salvation comes initially and continually through participation in Christ’s redemptive suffering and rebirth, and that this mystery is at the very heart of our reality as a church.³⁷⁵

The communal dimension of Baptism cannot be overemphasized since, at times in the history of the Church, it was overshadowed by the grace Baptism offers the individual. But as Susan Ross emphasizes, “the sacraments are not signs that mediate grace only to an individual, but are as well the community’s way of mediating God’s grace to all, individually and socially. This is not to dispute the uniqueness that pertains to each person, but to note that human beings live in communities, and experience grace in communities.”³⁷⁶ As social beings human persons rely upon communities to be nurturers,

³⁷⁴ Ibid., 48.

³⁷⁵ Ibid., 241.

³⁷⁶ Susan A. Ross, *Extravagant Affections: A Feminist Sacramental Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1998) 130.

teachers, guides, and safe space that encourages growth. Such communities are rich fields for the flowering of attitudes and behaviors which express the fullness of humanity. Church communities that support the lives of faith of their members strengthen the human capacity to live according to God's hope for humanity, to hear God's voice in the midst of human struggle. Sacraments are the social experience within these communities of faith that provide time and space to appreciate that God speaks. Martos explains why this is so: "for the sacraments are redemptive symbols. If we allow ourselves to listen to what God is telling us through them, if we open ourselves to the energizing grace that the Spirit communicates through them, they make salvation available and operative in the church."³⁷⁷ The Vatican II Document *Sacrosanctum Concilium* addresses the faith life evident within the sacramental experience: "they not only presuppose the faith, but through words and things also nourish it, strengthen it, and express it. That is why they are called sacraments of faith."³⁷⁸ An individual's faith life and that of the community are so intertwined they form a single web that captures the many gifts Baptism offers. Growth in faith happens when the person and the community recognize and value their intimacy. Such recognition is encouraged and supported within faith formation experiences

Implications for Religious Education

One of the ways communities support faith formation is through religious education efforts that guide members to participate in sacramental events. These may be the sacraments of the Eucharist, Penance, Confirmation, and Marriage and certainly Baptism. Preparation for the sacraments and the celebration of the rituals is as diverse as

³⁷⁷ Joseph Martos, *The Sacraments: An Interdisciplinary and Interactive Study* (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 2009) 235.

³⁷⁸ Austin Flannery, ed. *Vatican Council II Constitutions Decrees Declarations*, "Sacrosanctum Concilium," (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing, 1996) 59.

are these communities, but the intention is provide opportunities to strengthen personal and community faith life.

Ross describes a parish experience that highlights the indispensable relationship between community and individual as an RCIA director planned parish infant baptisms.

She notes:

She, along with other members of the pastoral team, visited the families in their homes, and involved a network of other families in the education process, so that the infants' baptism was a process that began with a ceremony of welcoming (in the home) and culminated in the actual ceremony of immersion in the church. The intent was to highlight the community's involvement and responsibility for new members of the parish, and for the family to connect with other parish members.

Thus baptism was the beginning of a long-term relationship for the child and for the family with the parish.³⁷⁹

Ross recognizes that, if Baptism is to effect what it promises, a process that engages families and the church community before the celebration of the sacrament is a significant step in opening the doors to new members. Parish faith formation programs can become the welcoming teams that set the tone for this type of initiation but they also require formation to recognize the value of this approach. Parishes that I have questioned, typically, only ask parents who seek Baptism for their child to attend one brief class that primarily focuses on the "how to" of the ritual. It acquaints the parents with the ritual format and exposes them to the meaning of the sacrament for their child but rarely does the community have any role

³⁷⁹ Susan A. Ross, *Extravagant Affections: A Feminist Sacramental Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1998) 212.

in the process. It is understandable, then, that parents and godparents most often consider Baptism as a blessing for their child rather than a gift to and from the community.

The family and the church community sustain one another when the initiation celebrated through Baptism is a communal event. The pastoral care evident in such a celebration is explained by Herbert Anderson who addresses the relationship between family and faith community:

The relationship between the family into which one is born or adopted and the Christian community into which one is baptized is a reciprocal one. On the one hand the process of parenting is enhanced by the awareness that the children in our homes belong to God. The second birth of baptism initiates each individual into an assembly in which the Christian story is remembered and from which each individual is drawn beyond the family into larger and larger communities of concern.³⁸⁰

These larger communities of concern are the ‘world’ into which Jesus dispatched his disciples – to share the good news he had taught them: “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age”³⁸¹ Two commands and a promise exist within these verses – teach, baptize, and the promise of Christ’s presence and support as his mission is continued by his followers. Maria Harris reminds readers that “the Christian vocation or calling is a continuing and ever deeper embodiment of the life, death, and resurrection of

³⁸⁰ Herbert Anderson, “Pastoral Care in the Process of Initiation” in *Alternative Futures for Worship, vol.2*, edited by Mark Searle (Collegeville, MN: Liturgical Press, 1987).105

³⁸¹ *The Holy Bible: Catholic Study Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011) Matthew 28:19-20.

Jesus of Nazareth, whom Christians believe has become the Christ.”³⁸² The role of those involved in faith formation is the same as that given to the first followers of Jesus – teach, baptize and share the good news that the Christ who lived, died, and rose so that we might come to know the God of unconditional love sends us forth to do.

Harris refers to this process as midwifery when she writes “the recognition of a living laity, living spirituality, and living sacramentality, summons today’s catechists/religious educators to the role of *midwife*...mid-wife catechists support people’s attempts to live the gospel – to *gospel* Jesus – to strengthen what is living, but they do not suggest such living is easy, and they do not do the living for the people they educate.”³⁸³ It is no easy task to midwife someone about to bring new life into the world. It requires patience, commitment, and a willingness to wait with the person until their time has arrived. The new life that is waiting to emerge is already present within persons experiencing catechesis; catechists offer information, support, encouragement, and the sense of community that is waiting to accept the miracle when the birth happens. The new disciples that enter the world through Baptism are gift that continues to give to the gospel message throughout their lives if their initiation has been a process rather than a momentary event that satisfies the sacramental guideline. The catechetical process Ross describes in her experience with the parish RCIA team is an excellent example of midwifery that guided the birth of a new and, hopefully life-long, disciple who now belongs to a community of faithful followers.

The members of a faithful community are storytellers; they know the Christ-story and eagerly share it with anyone who is ready to listen. Baptism preparation is an ideal time

³⁸² Maria Harris and Gabriel Moran, *Reshaping Religious Education: Conversations on Contemporary Practice* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998) 45.

³⁸³ *Ibid.*, 48.

to both tell the story and involve the listener as a character within its action. Thomas Groome explains the dynamics of such storytelling:

By Story I do not mean simple narrative. Narratives are indeed part of our Story, but our Story is much more than our narratives... By Christian Story I mean *the whole faith tradition of our people however that is expressed or embodied*. As our people have made their pilgrimage through history, God has been active in their lives (as God is active in the lives of all people). They, in turn, have attempted to respond to God's actions and invitations.³⁸⁴

The relationship between God and humans storytelling describes is covenantal in that God invites and we respond. Today's storytelling that takes place within communities of faith are both the individual stories sharing how that community responds as well as the bigger story of the response of the followers of Christ from the beginning of the story to our time and place. These stories are links in a chain – they depend upon one another for strength. Thomas Groome points out, “if we are to have aught by which to recognize God's will and work, then the story of our faith community must be made accessible over and over again...If we are to know God and find salvation in our present, then we must remember the Story of that faith community.”³⁸⁵ Religious educators are the storytellers that are so deeply involved in the story that they want others to know it and become characters who act and speak so that the story may continue. The next chapter will involve these storytellers in a conversation that focuses on their experience of their children's Baptism.

³⁸⁴ Thomas H. Groome, *Christian religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1999) 191-192.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, 193.

Chapter Five:

Attending, Assertions and Response

Listening to the mothers allowed me to look beyond my current vision to envision a reality which is more reflective of God's purpose, and become more inclusive of multiple insights. The five women consulted are not intended to be a sampling of women in the Church today; rather, they are persons whose individual experiences have an impact on my effort to create a response that takes seriously their perspectives regarding the water of Baptism and the care of Earth's water resources. In the next section, I record their thoughts as they expressed them, and develop my conclusions based on their insights. I will, then, propose some pastoral actions regarding the sacrament of Baptism that seeks to support the significance of the sacrament within the tradition, as well as move toward a transformation of the meaning of the water of Baptism with a view to appreciating the holiness of all Earth's water.

Hearing the Mothers

The women who shared their experiences of baptizing their children in a Catholic parish were interviewed with a view to gaining their insights regarding this dissertation proposal that questions the current preparation practices in anticipation of discovering the possibility of catechesis which promotes an understanding of the holiness of all water. The interviews took place in two different locations so that the needs of these mothers who all have small children might be met. The format was informal, allowing for an exchange of comments as the women considered one another's views. The women who participated ranged in age from thirty-five to forty-five; all had baptized their children within the past

six years. In order to maintain their anonymity the women were given the pseudonyms Delores, Clare, Charlotte, Mary, and Josephine. Their family members, when referenced, are also renamed.

The interview process was consistent with the Whitehead method of attending, assertion, and pastoral response. As the Whiteheads explain “attending is a Christian virtue through which we patiently discern the voice of God wherever revealed.”³⁸⁶ The conversation provided opportunity for the women to speak and to listen to one another, commenting on the differences and similarities of their experiences. Although not explicitly naming their understanding as divine revelation, as they spoke and listened they recognized the blessedness of one another’s experience. The women became fully engaged with one another as the conversation progressed, seemingly aware that one another’s words were both a reflection of their own beliefs as well as insight into deeper appreciation for their faith and for the presence of God within their families. The Whiteheads propose that “the two basic components of attending are the ability to listen actively and the ability to respond with accurate understanding.”³⁸⁷ As the women considered their own responses to the questions they seemed anxious to hear what others might say. Their attentive listening was evident as they interacted with one another in meaningful and respectful ways.

The second stage of the process of theological reflection is assertion. The Whiteheads speak about assertion in the context of the theological conversation that engages experience, tradition, and culture. They write, “listening to the Word, we are called to witness to it. Our witnessing brings us into the embrace of other believers. This communal exploration of the testimony of Christian tradition, personal experience, and

³⁸⁶ James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry* (Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward, 1995) 65.

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, 69.

cultural insight can be described as assertion.”³⁸⁸ The challenge assertion poses is the balance between professing personal beliefs while making room for the insights of others which, perhaps, lead in a different direction. The women with whom I spoke were careful not to impose their appreciation for the function of baptism within their family on others, but rather to recognize that experience is contextual and interpreted resulting in varied responses. The Whiteheads point out the significance of the assertion stage in the process. They note,

When we have carefully attended to the information arising from tradition, culture, and our own experience, we must bring the information into contact. The encounter may be a relatively peaceful one in which insights confirm and further illumine each other. But often the engagement becomes tense and challenging. Whatever the style of encounter, the success of this reflection depends on each source being allowed to assert its claims.³⁸⁹

As the women considered the ways Christian tradition has influenced their lives, the specific cultural dimensions which framed their interpretation, and their personal and family experiences they seemed to be grateful for the insights they gained from one another rather than feeling defensive about their own beliefs. At the same time the level of confidence regarding their personal contribution to the conversation grew as they became comfortable with the process.

It is vital to the integrity of this dissertation that the women are permitted to speak for themselves rather than my interpretation of their words, so the following section allows for their individual responses. Although their reflections on baptism are central to this

³⁸⁸ Ibid., 65.

³⁸⁹ Ibid., 81.

exploration the conversation began with questions about their personal experiences with water, questions that might be less intimidating than the later ones exploring religious attitudes and their spiritual appreciation of baptism.

When asked about their water experiences, Delores responded first: “we go the beaches to relax and have fun and reconnect.” she said when asked about her family’s favorite water places and water activities. “We walk through barefoot and look for shells. I feel like I get away from everything. I don’t have to think about anything else. That’s what beach vacations are to me; getting away and not having to look at my phone.” She demonstrated a sense of pleasure and satisfaction as she spoke about her children’s enjoyment of the water: “they are always jumping around, running around, laughing.” Mary spoke appreciatively about her family’s enjoyment of the ocean. Water makes her “think of peacefulness and a state of calmness and beauty. We love going to the ocean as much as we can. We love being on the water when we take our boat out.” Clare expressed greater reservations about the ocean and expressed her preference for springs. She said, “we don’t do the beach much because my little ones don’t swim. This summer we’re doing our trips around natural springs because the water is shallow.” She explained that her son, who is three, is “terrified of the ocean because he knows what’s in it. He’s so analytical; he won’t go in it because there might be a crab under the water and it might bite him.” Charlotte’s sons love to fish so they spend their water time fishing the lake behind her sister’s house. Josephine explained how she enjoyed looking at the water but her and her family’s interaction with it was minimal.

The conversation moved to the women’s thoughts about water. When asked “what comes to mind when you think about water” Delores talked about water’s cleansing ability;

she associated this cleansing with feeling refreshed and renewed. Clare agreed, “you know, at the end of the day, taking a nice hot shower is wonderful.” There were looks of pleasure as they spoke about water in this way. They were grateful they had running water whenever they needed it. Their words reminded me of the story of a young girl in Ethiopia who expressed amazement when she was told about water that comes out of a faucet when you turned it on. For her this was a phenomenon she could not even imagine.

Charlotte’s first thoughts about water related to thirst: “I drink a lot of water. I’m concerned about hydrating my body.” She continued, “There’s so much research, like bottled water is not good, tap water is not good. Really, which one is better than the other, I have no idea.” Clare then talked about how she and her husband prefer tap water to bottled water but Charlotte and Delores both preferred to drink bottled water. Delores commented, “I wonder about tap water. It tastes a little different than bottled water. I’m sure everything is clean enough, that it probably won’t kill you, but I still worry about tap water.” She felt that the process of bottling water cleansed the impurities and, for her, the water tastes better.

The conversation then moved to concerns over potential risks associated with the earth’s water sources. The women spoke mostly about the ocean. Delores said “I just relax around water so I don’t really think about it but Tom (husband) is very concerned about them. Mostly, he worries when Darren (son) is in the ocean. Clare and Charlotte also confessed they are nervous when their children are in the ocean because as Charlotte said, “so many accidents can happen.” Mary proposes that the question of risk is related to the issue of respect: “as long as you respect the water and know how to protect yourself, you should be okay.” They all agreed that their concerns would not prevent them from enjoying

the earth's water. They did not comment on concerns over health risks; rather, safety was their priority as they all had very young children.

Each of the women had somewhat different responses when asked about the cleanliness of the Earth's waters. Delores felt that "to me, in my mind, God has made it so that it self-cleanses. Humans do things to it that might make it take a little longer but eventually it cleans itself." Clare did say when her neighbor cautioned her about letting her children run through the sprinklers of water coming from the canal behind her house, "we live on a canal. A guy up the street tells me to take the kids out of the sprinklers because the canal water is treated with chemicals. He said I should make them shower off. I had not thought about that." Charlotte shared Clare's suspicion about chemicals in the water: "in any source, even the tap water we drink, there are more chemicals than we need. I just had an ocean theme in my classroom. One of the main things included in the lesson is water pollution." Angela, who is involved with water conservation efforts, also raised concerns about water contamination: "I think our water is endangered because, being part of some groups that try to protect the water and seeing what's out there, it's humans that cause the problems. We have to be more aware of our surroundings and pick up the garbage." Angela recognizes the individual's responsibility to keep waterways clean but she did not discuss corporation's or government's role in this task.

The women are aware of the possibility the water sources are endangered but this is not an immediate concern. In fact, Delores said, "I've never really researched it but if some changes aren't made to supply and demand coming up we might have some problems. Technology has a big deal to do with. I'm sure there is some technological way we could better use water; obviously it's expensive." None of the women expressed concerns over

the sudden extremes in nature's water events - hurricanes, droughts, or flooding. Clare says, "they don't even cross my mind." The women focus primarily on their family's daily activities rather than looking ahead to future concerns.

The conversation moved to the spiritual dimension of water and the possibility of understanding all water as holy. When asked if they think of the earth's water as holy Delores commented, "I've never really thought about it but it was created by God and placed by God; part of what he put here for us to survive." Clare quickly associated holy water with the sacrament of baptism when she said, "Yeah, I think I do because a lot of times baptisms are done in the ocean. A lot of different religions use waterways for Baptism." Charlotte agreed, "I do see the relationship." Mary associated her belief in water as holy with the effect it has on her. "For me, personally, it's my happy place, so I consider it good and I think of good as being holy. You're connecting with the earth and that, for me, is holy." To speak about the earth's water as holy seemed to be appropriate for all the women. They were certainly attuned to the giftedness of water in their lives, so calling it holy was consistent with that experience.

Was this evident in their preparation for their child's baptism as well as during the celebration of the sacrament; was the holiness of the earth's water part of the sacramental story? To explore this issue they were asked about their parish preparation program prior to the baptisms of their children. The mothers did not remember much about the session they were required to attend. Delores recalls a very informal session that "was only a half hour class" in which the role of godparents was discussed. She said they mostly talked about "the kind of stuff that I already knew growing up in the Catholic Church. They weren't telling us anything new. It seemed like a formality. They did talk about the symbolism

behind water. They said it symbolizes cleansing, cleansing of our sins. This is why we do it.” Josephine agreed with Delores regarding the length of time and the informal nature of the session. God parents were discussed and attention was given to the appropriate responses when the presider asked questions, but nothing was said about the water.

Clare also remembers the presenter explaining who is eligible to be godparents and why they are chosen, but does not recall much beyond that. She did say she thought the issue of godparents was important. “I think it’s a big decision if you take it seriously.” Charlotte called the session “a great reminder of a lot of rules and the way things should be.” When asked if water was discussed she said “I remember her explaining it – what the water symbolizes.” None of the mothers recalled the discussion of water to be a significant part of the preparation class, or that the class was particularly interesting. It was a necessary step in the process but one that left very little lasting impression.

The women, then, talked about what they most remembered as they prepared to baptize their children. Delores recalled how “it was an odd experience because his dad is not Catholic, so I had to convince him to allow me to baptize Darren in the Catholic Church. That was a little nerve-racking because he was coming with his new girlfriend or wife. They were not really into it so I was a little nervous about that. Everything went smoothly.” Clare also spoke about her conversation with her husband before the baptism. “George wasn’t raised catholic so his understanding of baptism is different from mine. We had to have some conversations before Joseph was baptized; he thought they should be baptized when they were old enough to choose. So that was his debate – should we choose it for him or should we wait until he’s old enough. Charlotte and her husband were both raised Catholic so baptism was a given for them. This led to a question about the

motivation to baptize their child. Clare shared how “because I was a sickly child and to me baptism is involvement with God in your life, and I wanted Joseph to have good faith. That’s why I did it.” Delores was looking ahead to CCD classes for Darren and, since he was now five years old, she said, “I got him baptized so he could go to CCD. It has to be done – it’s now or never.” Delores, whose mom was Catholic and very involved in her parish, knew that she needed to begin the sacramental process with baptism so Darren could receive First Communion. Charlotte’s comments reflected her belief in her Catholic heritage: “I went through it and getting to baptize my own child, it’s a big step, a big deal. The blessing is important to introduce them to that life. I needed to get started. We needed to continue the tradition.” Josephine, who also was raised in a traditional Catholic family, explained that it was important to her to be part of the Catholic tradition, and that baptism was necessary to do that. Mary understood baptism to be a time to introduce her child to the world. She spoke of the joy she experienced as her children were baptized. “I was so proud, I wanted to share them with everyone.” Most of the mother’s commented that they felt their children were *safer* if they were baptized.

The women all agreed that the memory of the importance of that day was very meaningful. Delores described how she was “teary-eyed” which was very unusual for her because “I’m not all that sentimental.” She said: “it was one of the first times everyone got together for Dylan and there were no issues, no problems. Both sides of the family were able to be there for him and to put their stuff aside.” The mothers agreed that their children’s baptisms were wonderful family events that were opportunities to focus on the blessedness of their experiences. When they considered any lasting effects Charlotte talked about how now that her son is seven she is able to have conversations with him about “the

flow from baptism to communion to confirmation. It's making more sense," while Delores told a story of her son's attachment to the gifts his grandmother gave him. "My mother gave him a little card with a saint on it and a rosary. I was surprised he kept it all. He has a little box with the date of his baptism which he still has in his room. I was surprised he even cared enough about it." Their honest and open expressions of the memories they have of their children's baptisms revealed deeply-held beliefs in the special nature of the sacrament. The women were asked if their children's baptisms changed their family life; this was not a question that evoked a response.

Did they understand baptism to be initiation into a community of faith prompting participation in parish life? The responses were probably the most univocal of any portion of the conversation. In diverse ways, all of the mothers said they do not associate baptism with regular church attendance. Charlotte believes "baptism is important in itself even if you do not go to church." Clare seems to continue to explore this question as she says, "I've changed a lot over the years. To me I think you can be a religious person and not go to church every Sunday. It's how you live your life. So I'm kind of on the fence about that. I have good faith and I want my children to have that but I don't think you have to go to church to express that." Mary and Delores were the most convinced that baptism is not about church participation; they agreed that baptism is important in your relationship with God but that relationship can thrive without going to church. The women had shared how meaningful their children's baptism was but they did not associate their love for the sacrament with a commitment to church practice or regular church attendance. As Charlotte said, "baptism is important in itself even if you do not go to church."

As this dissertation is concerned with the relationship between baptismal water and the Earth's water sources, the next questions attempted to explore the women's views regarding this relationship. They were asked, do you think it would be meaningful to associate the water in the baptismal font with the earth's water? The conversation around this idea was actually quite lively. Delores begins with "I believe so. It would make people feel more like the water in their daily life is blessed instead of just the water in church. It would give them a sense of God throughout their everyday life. I'm a believer in God but I don't think you have to be in church. We were always taught you can talk to God wherever you are so my thing is, why do I have to sit in church for an hour if I can talk to God wherever I am? That is a good opportunity for them to show that God is everywhere"

Charlotte's response was philosophical: "as I get older I love to connect things, especially things to God, to see how everything flows together." She spoke excitedly about the prospect of hearing something different from what she already knew. Clare also spoke about her desire to make connections between things she previously believed were disconnected. She explained, "I think that, often, when you bless yourself with the holy water in church you don't associate it with the water outside. It would be helpful if we did." Mary's love for water was evident in her response: "the water in the font came from the earth; regardless of where the water is, it came from the earth. I feel if we explicitly made the connection it would help people understand how important it is to take care of the earth's water." When asked if they would be willing to listen if the presenter in the baptismal preparation classed offered insights about this relationship, they all said they would. Charlotte responded: "that would be one of the things that I would say, okay, hold on, I do want to listen to this to understand the connection." Delores expressed her approval

by saying: “I think it would be something different that we haven’t heard before.” This theme of learning something new seemed to resonate with all the women.

However, would developing this idea within baptismal preparation be anything more than new knowledge? Clare pointed out “you would think of it (the Earth’s water) as you do the holy water, and, obviously, you are very respectful of the water in the church, so if you are thinking of all water in that way, you would have a different outlook – be more respectful.” Respect for the holy water in baptism is a given for the women; but is the ocean water that both relaxes and frightens, or the spring water that both refreshes and chills, or the canal water that yields both fish and dangerous chemicals – are these holy waters? These conversations provided great insights into this dissertation’s concerns over the viability of making room for the relationship between the water in the baptismal font and the waters of the earth within sacramental catechesis. As Mary explained, it is all Earth’s water.

Given the rich material shared by the women, in the next section I will put their insights in conversation with the information my research produced in chapter three regarding the culture’s assessment of the earth’s water sources, as well as the tradition’s voices speaking of the meaning of Baptism and baptismal water. I will make some assertions based upon the correlation of all three of these conversation partners, leading to proposals for a pastoral response that attends to the wisdom each offered.

Assertions Emerging from Conversations

A predisposition to making assertions within the process of theological reflection is to wait on God – silently wait for God to speak God’s word. The quiet waiting makes time for God’s purpose to become more evident. The Whiteheads speak about this quiet

listening in the context of the theological conversation that engages experience, tradition, and culture. They propose, “listening to the Word, we are called to witness to it. Our witnessing brings us into the embrace of other believers. This communal exploration of the testimony of Christian tradition, personal experience, and cultural insight can be described as assertion.”³⁹⁰ The challenge assertion poses is the balance between professing personal beliefs while making room for the insights of others which, perhaps, lead in a different direction. The women with whom I spoke were careful not to impose their appreciation for the function of baptism within their family on others, but rather to recognize that experience is contextual and interpreted resulting in varied responses. The Whiteheads point out the significance of the assertion stage in the process.

When researchers have carefully attended to the information arising from tradition, culture, and our own experience, we must bring the information into contact. The encounter may be a relatively peaceful one in which insights confirm and further illumine each other. But often the engagement becomes tense and challenging. Whatever the style of encounter, the success of this reflection depends on each source being allowed to assert its claims.³⁹¹ As the women considered the ways Christian tradition has influenced their lives, the specific cultural dimensions which framed their interpretation, and their personal and family experiences they seemed to be grateful for the insights they gained from one another rather than feeling defensive about their own beliefs. At the same time, the level of confidence regarding their personal contribution to the conversation grew as they became comfortable with the process.

³⁹⁰ Ibid., 65.

³⁹¹ Ibid., 81

Making assertions regarding the sacrament of baptism - including but not limited to the preparation process - as well as the current ecological concerns over the earth's water is a significant step towards *faith seeking understanding* of God's purpose for creation. These assertions wait to be informed by the wisdom experience, tradition, and culture offer in the dialogue that takes place around these issues. The Whiteheads assert it is "the promise of God's abiding Spirit"³⁹² that supports the truths revealed in conversation and the assertions made on behalf of those truths. Even so, asserting is a challenging task as contemporary culture is profoundly pluralistic. The pluralism we see today "is not just a contemporary phenomenon. The Christian witness of faith has been pluriform since the beginning, its diversity a sign both of the richness of its good news and the inexplicable mystery of God,"³⁹³ The Whiteheads caution that "the pluralism we experience among us reveals the real but partial access that each of us has to the truth."³⁹⁴ The interaction of three dimensions of truth through experience, tradition, and culture exposes greater access to divine truth, but even then this is limited. Therefore, the assertions are conditioned upon the information gained in those conversations.

My assertions and the consequential pastoral responses are guided by four theological principles. I will develop these principles, as I understand them, in this chapter. The first of these is God is ultimate mystery – knowable but never fully known. Next, knowledge about God is culturally based and framed by the worldview that gives birth to that knowledge. Third, human access to the divine occurs primarily through imagination – that exclusively human capability that creates images outside reason's framework. Lastly,

³⁹² James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry* (Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward, 1995) 77.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 77.

³⁹⁴ *Ibid.*

responding to the knowledge gained through dialogue with experience, tradition and culture is co-creating with God to bring about the reign of God within and among us. These principles are grounded in faith that God seeks to be known and share God's self with humanity; that divine desire makes possible the human capacity to discover God's presence in this world.

The Mystery That Is God

In his encyclical *Dives in Misericordia*, Pope John Paul II addresses the Mystery that is God and human access to that Mystery. Referencing scripture passages that attest to appreciating God as mystery he says:

Although God “dwells in unapproachable light” (1Tim 6:16) he speaks to man by means of the whole of the universe: “ever since the creation of the world his invisible nature, his eternal power and deity, have been clearly perceived in the things that have been made.” (Rom 1:20) This indirect and imperfect knowledge, achieved by the intellect seeking God by means of creatures through the visible world, falls short of “vision of the father.” “No one has ever seen God,” (Jn 1:18) writes St. John.³⁹⁵

The image of God Pope John Paul describes – God “dwells in unapproachable light” yet has “been clearly perceived in the things that have been made” – demonstrates the mystery that surrounds the God/human relationship that is the foundation of faith. The continuing presence of God with humans is made known when people of faith profess their belief in the power of God to walk among us in all times and places. This awareness emboldens the

³⁹⁵ John Paul II, “Dives in Misericordia,” June 16, 2015, w2.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/document.

courage for believers to make assertions in this age just as was done previously, with the recognition that God as mystery will never be fully accessed. Elizabeth Johnson professes:

the unfathomable mystery of God is always mediated through shifting historical discourse... Tracing these changes both in the scriptural period and throughout subsequent history makes clear that there has been no timeless speech about God in the Jewish or Christian tradition. Rather, words about God are cultural creatures, entwined with the mores and adventures of the faith community that uses them. As culture shifts, so too does the specificity of God-talk.³⁹⁶

If this is true, the words spoken about God in the year 2015 are as meaningful and yet as transitory as those spoken at any other time in history. Therefore, the attitudes, concerns, experiences, and awareness discussed in the preceding chapters allow for further exploration of divine mystery as revealed in this time and place.

Exploring divine mystery is theology's greatest gift and greatest burden.

Fortunately, the mysteries of God and faith are not realities humans may only question but not gain access to; if that were the case exploration would be futile. Divine mystery will only be known when God chooses to reveal God's self and God's purpose. This makes human exploration not only possible but crucial to appreciating God's actions on behalf of creation. Recognizing the limitations whenever the human person enters divine space, the truth God shares is not fully and completely comprehended. As Johnson explains, "the reality of God is mystery beyond all imagining. So transcendent, so immanent is the holy mystery of God that we can never wrap our minds completely around this mystery and

³⁹⁶ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1996) 6.

exhaust divine reality in words or concepts.”³⁹⁷ Given that, the quest for access to this mystery becomes even more profound as humans acknowledge the path to understanding God is endless.

Since God is mystery, Sallie McFague insists the only real way to speak about God is through metaphor that can proclaim God is like *this* but God is not exactly *this*. Christianity’s expression of faith says there is a personal power active among us that is life-giving and is fulfilled according to the needs of each generation. Mcfague says, A critical dimension of this expression is the imaginative picture, the metaphors and models that underlie the conceptual systems of theology. One cannot hope to interpret Christian faith for one’s own time if one remains indifferent to the basic images that are the lifeblood of interpretation and that greatly influence people’s perceptions and behaviors.³⁹⁸ These images may change as interpretations emerge that are consistent with cultural influences. Theology imagines how speaking about God in this time and place might best be heard and valued. McFague is critical of theology’s consistent use of images and metaphors that exclude and obscure meaningful ways of presenting God to contemporary culture, particularly through feminine imagery. McFague argues:

One of the serious deficiencies in contemporary theology is that though theologians have attempted to interpret the faith in new concepts appropriate to our time, the basic metaphors and models have remained relatively constant; they are triumphalist, monarchical, patriarchal. Much *deconstruction* of the traditional imagery has taken place, but little *construction*. If, however, metaphor and concept

³⁹⁷Ibid., 7.

³⁹⁸ Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological Nuclear Age* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989) x-xi.

are, as I believe, inextricably and symbiotically related in theology, there is no way to do theology for our time with outmoded or oppressive metaphors and models.³⁹⁹

The expression of God who is mystery cannot be limited by words and images that do not imagine the boundless ways God appears in human history. When mystery is explored down all its possible paths God becomes both father and mother. Elizabeth Johnson explains “in the end Holy Wisdom is mystery beyond all telling. Speaking about God as mother points to the depth of that absolute mystery.”⁴⁰⁰ The scriptures evoke numerous feminine images for God, including a pregnant woman, a mother hen, and a mother bear. In Isaiah we are told God cries out “like a woman in labor”⁴⁰¹ and promises the Israelites, “As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you.”⁴⁰² Jesus continues the image of God as feminine when he laments over Jerusalem and says, “how often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, but you were not willing.”⁴⁰³ The image of God a mother bear is particularly powerful in describing God’s anger over being forgotten by those God protected “I will fall upon them like a bear robbed of her cubs.”⁴⁰⁴ These images dispel the patriarchal insistence on describing God in exclusive male language. They honor the understanding of God as mystery that will not admit to limitations imposed by human paradigms. McFague speaks to the diversity of the feminine images of God in scripture when she says,

The metaphor of God which we have been considering is built not upon stereotypes of maternal tenderness, softness, pity, and sentimentality, but upon the female

³⁹⁹ Ibid., x-xi

⁴⁰⁰ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1996) 185.

⁴⁰¹ *The Holy Bible: Catholic Study Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011) Isaiah 42:14.

⁴⁰² Ibid., Isaiah 66:13.

⁴⁰³ Ibid., Matthew 24:37.

⁴⁰⁴ Ibid., Hosea 13:8.

experience of gestation, birth, and lactation. This experience in most animals, including human beings, engenders not attributes of weakness and passivity but qualities contributing to the active defense of the young so that they may not only exist but be nourished and grow.⁴⁰⁵

These and other feminine images attest to the possibility of discovering God through metaphors that take into consideration the breadth of God's presence in the world and the multiplicity of ways God interacts with the human and non-human family God created. But mother and father do not nearly exhaust the panoply of metaphors and images that allow the person to connect with the Divine presence. As Brian Wren beautifully frames it in his poem: "who is She, neither male nor female, maker of all things, only glimpsed or hinted, source of life and gender? She is God."⁴⁰⁶ She is the mystery in whom we live and move and have our being. She is seen – but only dimly, She is felt – but only if we allow ourselves to be sensitive to her touch, She is known – but far exceeds human ability to know. The Mystery that is God reveals God's self when, where, and how God chooses. Theology's task is to be ready to look and listen without establishing boundaries that prevent exposure to God's fullness. The challenge that exists in this effort is to make room for new revelation as God chooses to make it known.

Human Limitation in Discovering Mystery

God is not limited but human vision and capacity to absorb what God chooses to reveal is like looking through binoculars. The picture becomes clearer as one brings into focus what is within the lens, but so much lies beyond the scope of the field of sight. That

⁴⁰⁵ Sallie McFague, *Models of God: Theology for an Ecological Nuclear Age* (Minneapolis, MN: Fortress Press, 1989) x-xi.

⁴⁰⁶ Brian Wren, *What language Shall I Borrow? God-Talk in Worship: A Male Response to Feminist Theology* (New York: Crossroad, 1989) 164.

which is not visible attests to the infinite ways God is present in the world as well as God's transcendence, marking God's distinctness from the world. God is both present and absent. Elizabeth Johnson describes this dualism best when she says, "she is in the world but not bound by it; present and active, mutually engaged, but freely so, not amenable to human manipulation or exploitation."⁴⁰⁷ However, God's choice to be mutually engaged with creation provides a vast array of opportunities for human persons to become aware of God's presence and purpose, to be in relationship with the divine creator. Terry Veling speaks about "millions of moments of encounter"⁴⁰⁸ in his discussion of the interpretive process. He comments, "an important claim of hermeneutics is that we are always interpreting – or entering into conversation – not only with texts, but with the people, life, and events of the world around us."⁴⁰⁹ The same may be said for interpreting God's engagement with the world – there are millions of moments of encounter in which God says, "here I am." Being open to these moments allows humanity to engage divinity. In fact, Mary Catherine Hilker proposes that this openness to receive what God offers is the very nature of humanity. She writes "if God, in God's very being, is self-communicating love, and if God has freely chosen to extend to humanity the possibility of divine friendship, then humanity must be structured as openness or desire to receive that offer of love."⁴¹⁰ Humans need only be *human* to encounter God in ways that allow for a glimpse into Mystery.

⁴⁰⁷ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1996) 147.

⁴⁰⁸ Terry A. Veling, *Practical Theology: "On Earth as It Is in Heaven"* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005) 54.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁴¹⁰ Mary Catherine Hilker, *Naming Grace: Preaching and the Sacramental Imagination* (New York: Continuum, 1998) 31.

Although he accepts that God is always beyond our human ability to conceptualize, Karl Rahner speaks profoundly about God's self-communication and the human person's intuitive ability to respond. For Rahner, the human person is intrinsically bound to God, and human experience is the medium of revelation about God. Rahner says, "the simple and honestly accepted everyday life contains in itself the eternal and the silent mystery, which we call God and his secret grace, especially when this life remains the everyday... Wherever people are, there they are creatures who unlock the hidden depths of reality in their free, responsible actions."⁴¹¹ For Rahner, as for Hilbert, the human person is oriented toward relationship with God and, therefore, able to receive God's self-communication. The paradox of this relationship is that although God is transcendent God is present in creation and communicates that presence through experience. Rahner's beautiful prayer expresses this truth: "You are the first and last experience of my life. Yes, really You Yourself, not just a concept of You, not just the name which we ourselves have given You!"⁴¹² Since naming often denotes authority over, Rahner's prayer emphasizes how God is beyond any name designed to define who God is. The names we call God are necessary to create the images humans rely upon for understanding, but, appropriately, these names are abundant and often dissimilar, demonstrating the human incapacity to confine Mystery to any human concept.

However, naming also expresses love and familiarity, the expressions which best characterize the divine/human relationship for people of faith. Elizabeth Johnson speaks to this relationship by drawing upon Rahner's sense of God present within and among humanity:

⁴¹¹ Karl Rahner, *The Mystical Way in Everyday Life: Sermons, Prayers, and Essays* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2010), 173.

⁴¹² Karl Rahner, *Prayers for a Lifetime* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing, 1984) 17.

Karl Rahner has envisioned that because of the Word of God in our midst, it can now be seen that each of us is a little word of God. The one Word of God uttered in our midst reveals to us our own beauty, for we are each a little word and together we will spell out something great. “Human nature is the grammar of God’s self-utterance.” Our human nature is so made that God can speak in and through us.⁴¹³

God’s choosing to share God’s self with creation not only reveals the beauty that is God but also enables creation to participate in that beauty by becoming truly what it was created to be. For humans the beauty lies in remaining true to the relationship God intended for humanity. Such a commitment is rooted in faith in an ever-present God who speaks to and through human experience.

Rahner cautions that encountering God through faith requires great courage, possibly even more so in contemporary culture where faith is more challenged. As Rahner explains,

In such a situation the lonely responsibility of the individual in his or her decision of faith is necessary and required in a way much more radical than it was in former times. That is why the modern spirituality of the Christian involves courage for solitary decision contrary to public opinion, the lonely courage analogous to that of the martyrs of the first century of Christianity, the courage for a spiritual decision of faith...Such a solitary courage, however, can exist only if it lives out of a wholly personal experience of God and his Spirit.⁴¹⁴

⁴¹³ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Consider Jesus: Waves of Renewal in Christology* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1990), 33.

⁴¹⁴ Karl Rahner, *The Practice of Faith: A Handbook of Contemporary Spirituality* (New York, NY: Crossroad Publishing, 1986) 21-22.

Faith lived as an expression of relationship with God rather than only a cognitive assent to religious teaching is transformative for the individual and for the community. Catherine Mowrey LaCugna describes what it means when faith becomes a way of life.

Confessing faith is incomplete unless it becomes a form of life. Living faith in the God of Jesus Christ means being formed and transformed by the life of grace of God's economy: becoming persons fully in communion with all; becoming Christ to one another; becoming by the power of the Holy Spirit what God is: love unbounded, glory uncontained.⁴¹⁵

The boundless love human persons are gifted with through a faith of the wholly personal experience of God Rahner describes is appreciated within the everyday life of those who choose to be in communion with Divine Mystery. The relationship that grows as this love is shared exposes truth about God that is discovered when we imagine the possibilities for ourselves and for the world. In this imagining humans are given a glimpse of the world as God sees it.

Imagination Fuels Discovery of Mystery

In a 2010-2014 PBS *World Values Survey* in which they asked eighty-two thousand adults what values were most important in raising a child, imagination ranked ninth out of eleven choices among United States respondents, with hard work near the top.⁴¹⁶

Imagination did not appear at or near the top of the list in any of the fifty countries represented. This survey suggests that, for those adults questioned, developing an imagination is not essential to living a meaningful life. I wonder if the results would have

⁴¹⁵ Catherine Mowrey LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991) 377.

⁴¹⁶ Frank Bi, Elizabeth Shell, Vanessa Dennis, "Which Country Shares Your Parenting Values," *PBS Newshour*, March 13, 2014, PBS.org/newshour/updates/country-comes-parenting-values.

been different had they asked children. Nevertheless, since adults set the standards for important life values, imagination seems to be unimportant. Caryn Rivadeneira sees it differently. Writing in *Christianity Today* on the theology of the imagination Rivadeneira posits “without imagination life would be *terrible*, only the concrete here and now, the right in front of our faces. No imagination means we are not asking questions about the past, the future, the far-away, or the other – on this world or beyond.”⁴¹⁷ Imagination sparks thoughts, ideas, and conversations that bring the unseen into view. Imagination enlivens images that reveal the possible. Imagination looks into the real to discover a deeper reality.

Paul Ricoeur centers imagination in the process of coming to know reality and in making connections so that the world we see is not merely a series of disjointed objects with little or no coherence. Instead, Ricoeur says,

Imaging or imagining ... is the concrete milieu in which and through which we see similarities. To imagine, then, is not to have a mental picture of something but to display relations in a depicting mode. Whether this depiction concerns unsaid or unheard similarities or refers to qualities, structures, localizations, situations, attitudes, or feelings, each time the new intended connection is grasped as what the icon describes or depicts.⁴¹⁸

These connections are not imaginary in the sense that they are disconnected from the real world. In fact, the opposite is true. Thomas F. Daily clarifies the distinction between imaginary and the fruits of imagination when he says,

⁴¹⁷ Caryn Rivadeneira, “Theology of the Imagination: How our Very-real God Loves an Active Creative Mind” *Christianity Today*, June 18, 2014, <http://christianitytoday.com/women/2014/june/theology-of-imagination.html>.

⁴¹⁸ Paul Ricoeur, “The Metaphorical Process as Cognition, Imagination, and Feeling,” *Critical Inquiry*, 5(1): 148.

The creative imagination functions by way of a picture-making ability, a "seeing-as" which can carry us beyond the everyday world of ordinary description. This "figurability" should not be confused with the practice of evoking what is absent in the mind or what is unreal in our world. Rather, it relates to the capacity of the imagination to open up for us a *new* world of possibility.⁴¹⁹

Thus, imagination does not attempt to disguise reality or configure it according to mental gymnastics; imagination sees reality as it is possible to exist were it not for the unimaginative portrayals it suffers as a result of lack of vision. Paul Ricoeur describes the real power of imagination:

The more imagination deviates from that which is called reality in ordinary language and vision, the more it approaches the heart of the reality which is no longer the world of manipulable objects, but the world into which we have been thrown by birth and within which we try to orient ourselves by projecting our innermost possibilities upon it, in order that we *dwell* there, in the strongest sense of that word.⁴²⁰

This sense of imagination makes possible an encounter of Divine Mystery who *dwells* in the possibilities of reality rather than in the construct of the unimaginative mind. The challenge for the theologian is to enable human persons to dwell more fully in this world where imagination and Divine Mystery meet and where human persons might become more aware of what God wants. Dailey says, "it is this productive power to intimate a new reality by way of discovery and creation that gives to the imagination its ultimate purpose and value. Rather than re-presenting a picture of what was, the imagination fulfills a

⁴¹⁹ Thomas F. Dailey, "Playful Prayer: Imagination and the Task of Theology in Salesian Perspective," June 15, 2015, web1.desales.edu/assets/DaileyPlayfulPrayer.pdf

⁴²⁰ Paul Ricoeur, "The Function of Fiction in Shaping Reality," *Man and World*, 12 (1979).

heuristic purpose by enabling us to construct a "world" that *could* be."⁴²¹ It may very well be that God looks for us in this "possible" world so that we might participate in the process of re-creation, a process that seeks to transform all that is inconsistent with God's purpose.

Bernard Cooke describes what he believes it means to be human and the adventures imagination affords the truly human person.

Because we are knowers, we can extend the range of our human existing in almost infinite fashion; without ceasing we can enrich the world of conscious existence we move in. We can quite literally bring the richness of the universe that surrounds us into ourselves; and we can add to the wonder and beauty of that world by our own creative imagining.⁴²²

This description of the possibilities available to humans suggests that human persons share in what Elizabeth Johnson describes as God's being in the world. She writes "the mystery encompassing the world is more being-ful than all finite creatures combined; in fact, that God is the fire of sheer aliveness whose act of being overflows, bringing the universe into existence and empowering it to be. This language carries the companion recognition that all things are on fire with existence by participation in God's holy being which is unquenchable."⁴²³ Participation in the being of God allows for the human potential Cooke describes; creative imagining is the process that promotes the realization of this potential. We can be as Annie Dillard describes the creator. She notes "why so many forms? ... The creator goes off on one wild specific tangent after another, or millions simultaneously, with an exuberance that would seem to be unwarranted, and with an abandoned energy sprung

⁴²¹ Thomas F. Dailey, "Playful Prayer: Imagination and the Task of Theology in Salesian perspective," June 15, 2015, web1.desales.edu/assets/DaileyPlayfulPrayer.pdf. 5.

⁴²² Bernard Cooke, *Sacraments and Sacramentality* (New London CT, Twenty-Third Publications, 2006) 12.

⁴²³ Elizabeth A. Johnson, *She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse* (New York: Crossroad, 1996) 238.

from an unfathomable font... The creator loves pizzazz.”⁴²⁴ The creator’s energy is gifted to human persons so that we, too, might feel the exuberance that sparks creating.

Humans: Co-Creators with Divine Mystery

Annie Dillard’s expresses the magnificence of God’s creative work:

look, in short, at practically anything – the coot’s feet, the mantis’ face, a banana, a human ear – and see that not only did the creator create everything but that he is apt to create *anything*. He’ll stop at nothing. I’m sure I wouldn’t have had the imagination or the courage to do more than shape a single, reasonably sized atom, smooth as a snowball, and let it go at that.⁴²⁵

As Dillard describes God’s amazing ability to create *anything*, she recognizes the limitations of her own capacity in comparison. However, Dillard also identifies the two qualities that creation depends upon – imagination and courage. These are the same two qualities Ricoeur extols in his discussion of imagination’s role in the life of faith. Does imagination not only fuel discovery but also energize the capacity to create – to become co-creators with God to bring about God’s purpose for creation?

The Second Vatican Council Document *Lumen Gentium* expresses the relationship between holiness and the work Christian commitment requires.

All Christians in whatever state or walk of life are called to the fullness of Christian life and to the perfection of charity, and this holiness is conducive to a more human way of living even in society here on earth... The forms and tasks of life are many but there is one holiness, which is cultivated by all who are led by God’s Spirit. . . .

⁴²⁴ Annie Dillard, *Pilgrim at Tinker Creek* (New York, NY: Harper Collins, 1999) 135.

⁴²⁵ *Ibid.*, 133, 143.

All, however, according to their own gifts and duties must steadfastly advance along the way of a living faith, which arouses hope and works through love.”⁴²⁶

These works of love that are cultivated by the Spirit of God, who chooses fullness of life for all creation, transform the world according to divine purpose. As the USCCB states in its document *Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord*, “all of the baptized are called to work for transformation of the world.”⁴²⁷ As God formed the world, human person’s efforts to transform the world continue the work of creation God began; Co-creating with God is the privilege God affords humanity. As Dillard and Ricoeur suggest, co-creating demands imagination and courage, qualities gifted by God for the work people of faith are called to. *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* attests to the role humans play in transforming the world by becoming participants in God’s ongoing act of creating:

God thus enables men to be intelligent and free causes in order to complete the work of creation, to perfect its harmony for their own good and that of their neighbors. Though often unconscious collaborators with God’s will, they can also enter deliberately into the divine plan by their actions, their prayers, and their sufferings. They then fully become “God’s fellow workers” and co-workers for his kingdom.⁴²⁸

Therefore, the act of co-creating is both a privilege and a responsibility for all who profess belief in God’s presence in the world.

This dissertation is my effort to participate in God’s act of creating. As I explored what experience, culture, and tradition expressed regarding the state of the water in the

⁴²⁶ Second Vatican Council, *Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Lumen Gentium)* (LG), no. 40, 41 in *Vatican Council II: Constitutions, Decrees, Declarations* (rev. trans. in inclusive language), edited by Austin Flannery (Northport, NY: Costello Publishing, 1996).

⁴²⁷“Co-Workers in the Vineyard of the Lord: A Resource for Guiding the Development of Lay Ecclesial Ministry,” June 17, 2015, <http://usccb.org/upload/co-workers-vineyard-lay-ecclesial-ministry-2005.pdf>.

⁴²⁸ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1994) 81.

world and the sacramental use of this water in baptism I heard words of hope, cries of alarm, and wisdom that comes from being confronted with the questions that seek to discover the holiness of all water. The experiences of the mothers who engaged in conversations centering the earth's water and the water of baptism were crucial to determining an appropriate response that considers whether ecological concerns over water and sacramental practices for baptism are related. Their words of hope and their concerns for their children's safety exposed ways of looking at the issues that had not been fully appreciated. The mothers spoke not only to their experiences of water; they shared their beliefs about the role of baptism in their lives, their understanding of sacramental practice, and their expectations as they prepared to baptize their children.

Researching cultural analysis of the issues exposed the alarming statistics regarding the dire state of many of the earth's water sources, and the impact these have on the lives of all of earth's creatures, especially the most deprived. According to much of the information available through non-governmental agencies, concerned activists, and government sources the earth's water is in a serious state of decline requiring action to correct past abuse and vision to determine future treatment.

I looked to religious tradition as a partner in the conversation both about the concerns raised by culture regarding the earth's water as well as its particular wisdom relating to the sacrament of baptism. Christian religious tradition speaks loudly and prophetically about the relationship between human and non-human creation, beginning with the early Judaeo/Christian writings and continuing into the contemporary concerns over the moral issues inherent in the practices that lead to water shortages and pollution.

Tradition has much to say about the meaning, practice, and expectations of baptism, especially as it relates to building up the Christian community. Religious tradition is grounded in the sacrament that introduces people to Christian faith and provides a home for the fruitful Christian life baptism offers. The Christian tradition that emerged from the teachings of Jesus Christ relied upon Baptism to initiate new members and build a community of faith professed commitment to his work. This is the same expectation that continues today as Baptism is practiced throughout Christianity. Therefore, tradition's partnership in the conversation that engages experience and culture is vital to an appreciation of the role of baptism in the wider community.

Each of these sources of information allowed me to look deeply into the issues that gave rise to the topic of this dissertation, and to ask myself and others if my concerns over the earth's water, and my belief that there is an intrinsic relationship between that water and the waters of baptism, could be addressed simultaneously; might this provide insights that would both address the concerns and re-affirm the significance of baptism for the community of faith. Would the assertions I imagined when I began the process hold true once I heard from these diverse and invested sources of information? Hearing with an open mind allows me to determine this, and to act in accordance with the knowledge I gained.

The Conversation between Experience and Culture

Terry Veling says, "Practical Theology is an effort to always honor the appeal to human experience."⁴²⁹ Practical Theologians center experience as the voice that most profoundly speaks to the concrete situations of everyday life; the Whiteheads identify it as

⁴²⁹ Terry A. Veling, *Practical Theology: "On Earth as It Is in Heaven"* (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 2005) 18.

“a critical voice in the theological conversation.”⁴³⁰ Hearing the voices of experience through the mothers who participated in the interviews, I am able to make assertions regarding culture’s concerns for the earth’s water that I researched in Chapters One and Two. The assertions that follow come from a reflective assessment of the experience of these women with the waters of the earth.

As discussed, the women all took great pleasure in the water experiences that are part of their family life. They spoke about the beauty and peacefulness of the places they visited, and the happiness their children experienced. They spoke often about scheduling vacation time around water activities because that is where they were most able to get away from the stresses of life and relax. They seemed to greatly appreciate the wonder and beauty these places afforded. Even though they expressed concern about the dangers their children faced as they interacted with nature’s water, these would not prevent them from taking advantage of the time they spent with water.

As I reflected upon their conversation I became aware of the minimal attention they gave to the possibility that the earth’s water is polluted and that clean healthy water is becoming scarce for many people throughout the world. There was very little discussion about waterborne diseases or the deadly impact of the chemicals in the water supply. Seemingly unaware of the practices that lead to depletion of groundwater and the disruption of the natural flow of groundwater through damming, the women were very focused on the immediate impact the water has on their family, particularly their children. Concern for their children’s safety was paramount for all the mothers, but this concern was directed toward the possible violence inherent in any of nature’s waters.

⁴³⁰ James D. Whitehead and Evelyn Eaton Whitehead, *Method in Ministry: Theological Reflection and Christian Ministry* (Lanham, MD: Sheed and Ward, 1995) 43.

Prior to these conversations I would have speculated that water pollution and scarcity would have greatly troubled the women as, it seemed to me, there was much evidence to support these concerns. I thought that water practices which add dangerous chemicals to all water sources would greatly concern the mothers of growing children. Since this is not what I heard from them, I re-assessed my views to come to a clearer understanding of where I think we are in relationship to the earth's water and how we might better care for that which supports all life. I did not doubt the legitimacy of culture's dire predictions about the collapse of our water supply if changes were not forthcoming, but I reconsidered the best approach to confront the issue.

Some of the mother's spoke about educational material in school curriculums that address water issues, but my impression was that these are minimal and only part of classroom instruction. I determined that one of the best ways to educate the parents about water concerns is through their children. Educational methods that connect school children with their families provide better reinforcement for children and families than does instruction that is exclusively classroom oriented. Lessons that address the water concerns raised by culture's assessment of current water crises, practices, and climate's role should be joint ventures between the classroom and the home. Droughts, flooding, global warming, and unusual storm activity impact the daily life of people in all parts of the world, so information that offers access to greater understanding of these water happenings serves to raise awareness. Hopefully, becoming more educated about the effects of water pollution and shortage on our planet reduces fear and invites participation in the dialogue that sparks commitment to recognizing and promoting solutions. It is said that education

leads to success; the hoped-for success is saving the earth's water for many generations to come.

The women did address the bottled water versus tap water controversy; although they expressed preferences for one or the other, and some concern over which contains more harmful chemicals, the conversation focused on taste and purity more than access. In the United States people take clean drinking water for granted, not giving too much attention to the lack of access by so many other people in the world. Only when people are faced with the personal disruption of access, as happened to the people in Detroit, do they appreciate the great privilege of turning on the tap. Additionally, bottled water is readily available to all who can afford it. Therefore, concerns over access to drinking water are minimal. Since this is one of the greatest challenges and most critical deprivation for the poor throughout the world, with forty percent of the world's population lacking access to fresh water, it is an issue that must concern all who profess faith in the God of creation. Culture asserts there must be an immediate response to this crisis but attempts to address it have had little lasting impact. Many are still dying from waterborne diseases, and most of these are young children. People cannot look at these children as they are portrayed on our television screens and turn away, thinking there is nothing we can do to help them. The women who gathered to share and to listen to one another were gifted people who, given the necessary information and the opportunity to brainstorm, are certainly capable of developing a vision that looks at the crisis and a response that contributes to a remedy. Their concerns over the safety of their own children would stretch to include all children once their awareness is heightened. It is my claim that these women, and many others like them, are gifted with the compassion to be able to mother children from every culture; they

need only be encouraged and supported in their effort to do so. Let the mothers speak and act.

Their actions might emerge from the answer to the question, is water a commodity or a human right? Efforts to provide clean drinking water to all the world's people are conditioned upon accepting the moral value that clean water is a right all people should enjoy, regardless of socioeconomic status. Water rights should not be owned and used for profit, nor should those with the means be permitted to control the land masses that house the reservoirs. It is my position that mothers, whose greatest priority is to protect their children, would denounce practices that prevent any child from access to clean healthy water. The Catholic Church has been a strong voice in support of water as a right. I propose that these mothers who are bringing their children for baptism in the Catholic Church would accept and respond to this religious claim that water is a right and not a commodity. I suspect they are unaware of the Church's position in this regard, or even that the Church has raised its voice to denounce the use of water as a commodity, so have not considered their own involvement in this very crucial issue. This is a right to life concern that deserves the same attention given to other such issues. I trust mothers who so greatly value all children's well-being are the perfect spokespersons to share the Church's concern about the access to water for all.

Cultural outrage over the infiltration of chemicals into the earth's water supplies is evident in much of the literature addressing water safety. The women I interviewed seemed aware of this potential risk in the water they and their families drink, bathe in, and enjoy as family pastime. Their concerns were much more subdued than those expressed in many cultural venues; however, did recognize there were ways to combat this infection of

our sources of water. These women are heavily invested in the technological age, so it is understandable that their initial point of reference was to claim technology as the instrument to restore clean water through the use of advanced practices that were not previously available. Technology certainly can assist but the will to do so is dependent on human persons committing to change, which is an enormous challenge as so many profit from the detrimental use of chemicals. Personal concern over the chemicals in drinking water more often leads to the consumption of bottled water than it does to going to the source of the contamination to correct the problem. Bottled water is part of the problem rather than movement toward a solution. Recognizing the magnitude of addressing so many concerns about the earth's water, and appreciating that mothers raising young children are called upon every day to respond to challenges, efforts to engage them in the water crises we face must respect family responsibilities. However, if a balance is can be achieved, these women seemed very open to becoming involved in something, whatever that might be and however it might be framed, that protects the lives and provides for the safety of children in the present and for the future.

Assertions: Experience in Conversation with Tradition

The conversation between experience and the tradition is essential to the development of a pastoral response that considers contemporary insights and beliefs regarding baptism and the religious tradition that honors baptism's history and significance in the Christian life of faith. Experience speaks to the signs of the times and tradition envisions signs for all times. Experience is valuing the concrete as a glimpse into divine being while tradition sees God's presence and action in every age. As experience and tradition engage in dialogue they both support and challenge each other with wisdom that

opens up new horizons for experience and moves tradition into contemporary culture in ways that strengthens its reach and promise. Their dialogue allows each to become more than either could be independently; it raises both to a mountaintop view that promotes a clearer vision of divine presence.

In the conversation between experience and tradition, the questions explored four areas of concern – the meaning of baptism, the preparation process, the baptism ritual, and the possible relationship between water in the baptismal font and the Earth’s water. The women who processed these questions all had baptized their children in a Catholic parish within the past six years. These mothers shared thoughts, ideas, and feelings relative to the issues discussed. My interest and wonder came into play with the first question about what baptizing their children meant to them; I did not expect what I heard. Baptism, for these mothers, was primarily an opportunity for God to bless their children and for them to introduce their children to the wider community (or as they expressed it – “to the world”). Each of them described the event as “very special” and holy. They all believed their children were safer as a result of baptism, understanding the sacrament as a deep exchange between their children and God. Although it was very personal, they appreciated the social dimension of the baptism and the involvement in community, but their understanding was very different from tradition’s sense of the way the sacrament initiates new members into a community of faith. None of the mothers believed attendance at Mass or participation in parish life was a consequence of Baptism. Instead, they expressed a hope that the baptism would lay the foundation for their children to become good people who live according to moral principles. This is the grace the sacrament offers. However, they did not seem to have any commitment to tradition’s sense of baptism’s role in building up the body of

Christ – the Church. They did, however, seem to be saying differently what Joseph Martos spoke of as the door to the sacred, but it was not the religious society which opens that door – it was God’s action drawing their children forth into sacred space. Further, the tradition teaches that baptism means death to sin but none of the mothers spoke of this gift of the sacrament. They did, however, have a sense that their children were “more alive” as a result of baptism. The spiritual significance of Baptism was, again, expressed as a personal relationship with God who would care for their children and keep them safe. If asked, they would probably say they heard the voice, that was heard at the baptism of Jesus saying “this is my beloved son with whom I am well pleased,” speaking the same about their children. The Spirit of Love would enable their children to become the generous, loving, moral persons their mothers hoped for.

Hearing these women speak about the meaning of Baptism raised questions regarding the teaching that Baptism is as much for the community as it is for the individual. I do not think the mothers would disagree with that. However, I do think they would identify the community that benefits from their children’s baptism differently; rather than impacting a community of faith, they would look to the world at large, the society into which their children move, as beneficiaries of the grace of Baptism. In Chapter Three, I highlighted questions Martos asked about the role of the community of faith in welcoming newly baptized members. I think the mothers’ central concern is whether their children would be able to live faithfully within the society that surrounds them. Would they look to or need the faith community to support their efforts to do so?

The experiences these women described in the process of preparing to baptize their children were primarily family issues that either supported or impeded their efforts. Their

family situations were most memorable when they were asked about preparation for the sacrament. It was not until I specifically questioned them about parish requirements and preparation classes that they recalled some of what they experienced, which was minimal in time and scope. Since the one class they attended was only one half hour long, and most of it concerned Church rubrics, there was no opportunity to explore meaningful questions which considered the wonderful gift the sacrament is for their child, their family, and the wider community. The legal concerns about godparents, the proper responses during the ritual, and the actions of the presider received the most attention. The meaning of the sacramental symbols that offers great insight into the richness of the tradition was hardly discussed. I wonder if the symbols were afforded the attention they deserve as physical realities that point to divine presence, would their preparation have been more memorable. Would the parents and godparents have gained a deeper appreciation for the many ways God is visible to human persons? I suggest it is probable that, had they been offered the sense of sacramental symbols Bernard Cooke describes – “they not only give us information and understanding; they touch our imaginations, emotions, desires, and loves and they trigger our decisions and activity”- they would certainly have remembered not just the preparation but also the continual life of the sacrament well beyond the baptism ritual. Baptismal preparation is a time when parents are most sensitive to the holy in their lives and most attuned to all the emotions the event sparks. It is appropriate and just for the Church to support their experience by enriching them with information that offers a vision that sees beyond physical reality. Symbols have the power to achieve that.

The Baptism ritual is the climax of preparation and anticipation that has engaged the parents and godparents and marked the beginning of new life for the children. The Didache is specific in describing the ritual action, down to the temperature of the water: After repeating all that has been said, immerse in running water in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. If no running water is available, immerse in ordinary water. This should be cold if possible; otherwise warm. If neither is practicable, then pour water three times on the head, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit.⁴³¹

More than one thousand nine hundred years later the Church continues to baptize in this way, but it is striking that it has adopted the least preferable form of the use of water as the most used today. That is even more astounding when the ritual is performed in the United States, one of the most affluent countries in the world with consistent access to “running water.” Even so, it is astounding that tradition has maintained the ritual continuity for so many centuries. But has the Church continued to appreciate the holiness of water that is acknowledged when the story of the baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River is read? Jesus walked into this amazing river, still visited by many who immerse themselves as he did to access divine presence, rising to its surface as a sign to all who seek God’s mercy and forgiveness. Do contemporary baptism rituals reflect the powerful image Jesus’ baptism portrays? Do these rituals afford the symbol of water the opportunity to function as an intermediary between what is visible and that which lies beyond what eyes may see? Edward Schillebeeckx says, “apart from their own value as the visualizing of a transcendent reality, symbols, as the metaphorical expression of a particular experience,

⁴³¹ “The Didache: The teaching of the Twelve Apostles,” April 7, 2015, http://theinstituteofcatholicculture.org/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/theDidache_handout.pdf.

connect explicit consciousness to the stream of the whole of our subconscious world.”⁴³²

Meaningful rituals effect this connection between explicit consciousness and the human subconscious which is rich with imagination, but, if poorly celebrated, cause a disconnect that interferes with the ability to grasp the deeper reality. Water as symbol is a natural intermediary between these two realities as it is the source of all existence and is evident in the world in so many ways. Water does not need to be introduced to human imagination – it is already known and valued. Ritual need only remind human persons of its power to reveal divine presence, but it only does so when it truly allows the symbol to speak.

The women I interviewed to determine if the water in the baptism ritual was a dynamic symbol of the presence of God responded with lukewarm assent. They recognized water’s purpose to cleanse and purify but any connection to that subconscious world that harbors imagination and a more expansive vision of God’s purpose was not acknowledged. The ritual provided the certitude of safety, the assurance of blessedness, they desired for their children, but did not speak to them of the transformation that is possible when one experiences the refreshing, breadth of influence within the ritual, giving it time to and space to express itself, would open the door to the sacred that baptism promises.

When the conversation with the mothers moved to the relationship between the baptism water and the Earth’s water one of the mothers simply said, “but the water in baptism comes from the earth, so there is no difference between the two.” Her insightful response demonstrated how easily the *holy water* in the oceans, river, streams, and springs could be integrated into the accepted holiness of the water in the baptismal font. It is all the earth’s water. The challenge lies in practice of blessing the water in the font as if only then

⁴³² Edward Schillebeeckz, *The Collected Works of Edward Schillebeeckz: Volume 10: Church The Human Story of God* (New York: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014) 19.

does it become holy, separating its prior state from its existence as the water of baptism. This distinction is exacerbated through the Church directive that identifies its space as the primary location for valid baptisms. However, if baptism is permitted in other places if circumstances dictate and emergencies arise, does that not suggest that the water used is just as blessed as the water in the font? When the faithful approach the water in Church fonts there is, typically, an attitude of respect and reverence. Would catechesis that teaches the holiness of all water and, therefore, reverence toward all water, promote greater respect for the earth's water sources, respect that would help restore the integrity and purity the vital element of existence demands?

Water is so prevalent on the planet that it is taken for granted, expecting it will always be available. The Church, itself, has spoken boldly that this is not the case, that we have so damaged the earth's water that it is becoming less able to support creation. Popes, bishops, and the faithful have all protested human treatment of the earth's natural resources and have urged the development of plans of action that will end the degradation of earth's water. The women I spoke with agreed with the position the Church has taken; they also want to explore the possibility of stopping and reversing current practices that affect water's quality and quantity. For this reason, they seemed very open to catechetical formation within baptism preparation programs that addresses concerns over the earth's water through discussion of the holy water in the font. The women did not see a disconnect between the oceans, rivers, and streams, and the water used in the Baptism ritual. In fact, their enthusiasm over learning about this relationship was a sign of hope that both the meaning of the sacrament and the dire state of earth's water sources would both benefit from such a conversation. Recalling that the joy and satisfaction they experienced with

their children's baptism was a consequence of their belief that the sacrament opened the door to a blessed relationship with God which meant greater safety for their children, the mothers appreciated efforts to restore safe water to the planet. They envisioned a world in which no child would die from lack of access to clean healthy water. If baptism preparation can enhance the women's understanding of their role in guaranteeing clean water access for all the world's children, it would be of great service to restoring the earth's water.

Assertions: The Conversation between Tradition and Culture

In so many respects tradition and culture share the concerns over the degradation of the earth's water resources. Chapter three was an in-depth assessment of government and private enterprise's response to the continual pollution of the earth's water and to the diminishment of clean water that is accessible to people throughout the world. Chapter four looked closely at the disposition of the Judaeo/Christian heritage to realize the immense contribution water as symbol of divine power and presence offered to the system of belief that emerged from this tradition. Both of these voices speak profoundly about the risks inherent in the human practices that endanger the health of our planet as well as the morality of denying clean water to so many inhabitants of the earth. As the research suggests, these concerns have been raised by both conversation partners for many years; the conversation continues today with a much more urgent tone that encourages immediate action to save a planet in peril.

In June 2015, Pope Francis delivered to the Church and to the world his first encyclical; it is very telling that the Pope chose care of planet earth as his area of concern. In "On Care For Our Common Home" Pope Francis refers to Saint Francis' description of planet earth as a sister and a mother – "a sister with whom we share our life and a beautiful

mother who opens her arms to embrace us.”⁴³³ This imagery sets the tone for the encyclical that seeks to raise awareness that our sister and mother suffer abuse at the hands of the human family. Pope Francis says, “This sister now cries out to us because of the harm we have inflicted on her by our irresponsible use and abuse of the goods with which God has endowed her,”⁴³⁴ as he encourages remorse for the sin of abuse and reparation for the harm inflicted upon the natural world.

Pope Francis points out that his concern for the earth is not unique among the popes; Pope John XXIII in the early 1960’s, Blessed Pope Paul VI after him, Saint John Paul II, and Pope Benedict XVI all expressed great concern over the human treatment of God’s creation. He quoted Saint John Paul II who warned that human beings seem “to see no other meaning in their natural environment than what serves for immediate use and consumption,”⁴³⁵ and Pope Benedict XVI’s proposal to eliminate “the structural causes of the dysfunctions of the world economy and correcting models of growth which have proved incapable of ensuring respect for the environment.”⁴³⁶ Pope Francis relies upon the wisdom of the Popes who preceded him and the “reflections of scientists, philosophers, theologians, and civic groups, all of which have enriched the Church’s thinking on these questions.”⁴³⁷ He makes it clear that these are concerns that culture and religious tradition share.

Pope Francis immediately identifies the challenge inherent in responding to the global crisis: “The urgent challenge to protect our common home includes a concern to bring the whole human family together to seek a sustainable and integral development, for

⁴³³ Pope Francis, ‘*Laudato Si*,’ *On Care for Our Common Home* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2015) 7.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, 8

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, 9

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*, 10.

we know that things can change.”⁴³⁸ No one is excluded from the responsibility to seek change that will restore the planet to health; therefore, I propose it is appropriate that this effort is addressed in parish sacramental programs when the faithful is most focused on how God is present in the world. I would not be able to do justice to Pope Francis’ encyclical if I addressed the myriad of issues that are points of concern. Therefore, I will limit my engagement of this phenomenal document to the issue of water. As Pope Francis highlights, “fresh drinking water is an issue of primary importance, since it is indispensable for human life and for supporting terrestrial and aquatic systems... Water supplies used to be relatively constant, but now in many places demand exceeds the sustainable supply, with dramatic consequences in the long term.”⁴³⁹ These words echo the research produced by agencies such as the United States Department of Agriculture, the Water Science School, and NOAA, as well as private ecological groups like Earthjustice and the Socio Environmental Research Organization. Each of these spoke also to the dire consequences of the degradation of earth’s water resources.

Pope Francis is particularly attuned to the moral dimension of lack of access to clean water. As he says, “one particularly serious problem is the quality of water available to the poor. Every day, unsafe water results in many deaths and the spread of water-related diseases, including those caused by microorganisms and chemical substances.”⁴⁴⁰ The Natural Resources Defense Council and the Environmental Protection Agency have both warned of the health hazards attributable to polluted water supplies, while UNICEF reports on the numbers of children in developing countries who have been exposed to deadly diseases because of chemical infiltration and pollutants in their drinking water.

⁴³⁸ Ibid., 13-14.

⁴³⁹ Ibid., 24.

⁴⁴⁰ Ibid.

It is indisputable that Pope Francis considers concerns over the availability of clean water a moral issue as well as an economic and ecological one; those without the means or the resources to acquire safe water suffer the most. He speaks directly to the privatization of the earth's clean water supplies, and the human right vs. commodity argument that continues to engage the religious and cultural world; Pope Francis clearly adopts the position that clean water is a human right:

Even as the quality of available water is constantly diminishing, in some places there is a growing tendency, despite its scarcity, to privatize this resource, turning it into a commodity subject to the laws of the market. *Yet access to safe drinkable water is a basic and universal human right, since it is essential to human survival and, as such, is a condition for the exercise of other human rights.*⁴⁴¹

His use of italics in this statement suggests the great importance of appreciating the human right to safe drinking water. Finally, Pope Francis identifies “the problem of clean water is partly an educational and cultural issue, since there is little awareness of the seriousness of such behavior (e.g. wasting water) within a context of great inequality.”⁴⁴² Pope Francis has chosen to officially become part of the conversation that explores the dangers inherent in the water crisis and offers direction to the world to respond as persons invested in the survival of creation; persons who choose to make amends to their sister earth for the abuse she has suffered. The Pope appeals to contemporary culture to recognize the morality of the issues involved in the discussion of restoring the earth to its dignity and meeting the needs of the entire human family, especially those who have no means to ensure their access to human rights. Pope Francis' courage to become a voice for the earth which he describes as

⁴⁴¹ Ibid., 25.

⁴⁴² Ibid.

“the most abandoned and maltreated of our poor,”⁴⁴³ is reflective of the strength the human person receives from God in order to become co-creators in pursuit of the divine purpose for all creation. The Pope has immense power, especially with the Catholic faithful, so his words assume the authority of one who represents God’s urging for the human family to protect and safeguard all God has created.

Pastoral Response in Liturgy and Catechetics

Becoming more than we can be is the power of grace that raises human persons up to become co-creators with God; persons who are capable of saying and doing what is borne out of the desire to promote the reign of God in the world. The wonder and the vision, which humans experience as they recognize the strength and courage that is available to them through divine support, becomes the motivation to seek out divine purpose and appreciate our power to contribute to it. The pastoral responses I propose are my efforts to acknowledge my participation in God’s act of ongoing creation.

The process of theological reflection moves from asserting to a pastoral response that anticipates a transformation of current practice that is enriched by the dialogue between experience, tradition, and culture. The insights I gained from my conversation with women who shared their experience of life in the world of water, and their understanding of the meaning of Baptism exposed my previous assertions to re-examination with a view to envisioning a pastoral response that considers what they shared. My research into tradition’s heritage regarding the sacrament of Baptism, as well as its engagement in the world’s water crisis, permitted deeper exploration of its contribution to my concerns. The voice of culture awakened me to the urgent need for a response to the human degradation of the natural world. Hearing these three conversation partners enabled

⁴⁴³ Ibid., 7.

me to develop pastoral actions in three areas which are the heart of the spiritual life of a parish community – liturgy, catechesis, and adult faith formation. My intention is to contribute to a greater awareness of the meaning of Baptism, the earth’s water concerns, and the possibility of promoting a relationship between them.

Liturgical Response

The first of these actions looks to the Church’s yearly liturgical celebration of the Baptism of Jesus in the Jordan River. The theological sense of God as mystery, as well as the human desire to touch the transcendent, becomes most significant as the Church celebrates the Eucharist. The committee on evangelization and catechesis explains, “liturgy itself is inherently catechetical. The Sunday liturgy teaches and shapes the faith of the People of God through the proclamation of the Scriptures, the recitation of the Creed, the Eucharistic Prayer, and Communion.”⁴⁴⁴ The faithful are invited to be with divine presence in a unique way as they listen to the Word, offer themselves for service, and receive the body of God to sustain them as they move between the Church and the world. The mystery of the “unapproachable light” of which Pope John Paul speaks approaches humans through the Eucharistic celebration.

The Catechism of the Catholic Church professes, “liturgy is the action of the whole Christ,”⁴⁴⁵ and, therefore, an experience in which the divine is present and active among the faithful. LaCugna describes the dynamic relationship between God and humans in the celebration of the sacrament: “God moves toward us so that we may move toward each other and thereby toward God. The way God comes to us is also our way to God and to

⁴⁴⁴ *Sacramental Catechesis: An Online Resource for Dioceses and Eparchie*, Committee on Evangelization and Catechesis, United States Conference of Catholic Bishops (Washington, DC: United States Conference of Catholic Bishops, 2012) 27. <http://www.usccb.org/beliefs-and-teachings/how-we-teach/catechesis/upload/Sacramental-Catechesis-11-19-12.pdf>.

⁴⁴⁵ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1994) 294.

each other: through Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. This is our faith, confessed in creed and celebrated in the sacraments.”⁴⁴⁶ Addressing its desire for the faithful in the celebration of the Eucharist, the Catechism says, “Mother Church earnestly desires that all the faithful should be led to that full, conscious, and active participation in liturgical celebrations which is demanded by the very nature of the liturgy and to which the Christian people, ‘a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, and a redeemed people’ have a right and obligation by reason of their baptism.”⁴⁴⁷ It is through liturgy that the faithful best express a living faith that transforms life. *The General Directory for Catechesis* explains the relationship between liturgy and catechesis:

Catechesis is intrinsically bound to every liturgical and sacramental action.

Frequently however, the practice of catechetics testifies to a weak and fragmentary link with the liturgy: limited attention to liturgical symbols and rites, scant use of the liturgical fonts, catechetical courses with little or no connection with the liturgical year; the marginalization of liturgical celebrations in catechetical programs.”⁴⁴⁸

The central role of liturgy in the life of the faithful provides a wonderful opportunity to offer an experience of God that recognizes the theological significance of the sacrament of Baptism, while encouraging an appreciation for the symbol of water that speaks so profoundly of God’s presence in the world. As the community of believers hears the Word describing the baptism of Jesus on the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord, and is encouraged

⁴⁴⁶ Catherine Mowrey LaCugna, *God for Us: The Trinity and Christian Life* (San Francisco, CA: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991) 377.

⁴⁴⁷ *Catechism of the Catholic Church* (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1994) 313. 295..

⁴⁴⁸ *General Directory for Catechesis*, “Catechesis, an essential moment in the process of evangelization” #64, June 30, 2015, www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/clergy/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_17041998_directory-for_catechesis_en.html.

to relate Jesus' baptism to their own, a simple ritual, reading, or presentation would create an opportunity for a deeper realization of that truth. The faithful would be given time and space to experience the historical Baptism in light of its meaning in the Christian life today. The liturgical action would seek to answer the question: What does the Baptism of Jesus in history say to the contemporary Church as it continues the practice of baptizing its children and adults? Is there a message that both connects us to the historical action and gives meaning to our experience of being washed with the water of Baptism? As these questions are explored through language, symbols, art, music or any other medium that excites the imagination, the symbol of water has an opportunity to assert its place of privilege in sustaining life.

The inclusion of playful prayer in the liturgical action, an experience Dailey describes in his consideration of the role of imagination, is particularly significant. Dailey says the picture-making ability of the creative imagination "relates to the capacity of the imagination to open up for us a *new* world of possibility."⁴⁴⁹ I would argue this is the same possibility that every liturgy hopes to provide—a new way of recognizing and relating to God with us. Playful prayer moments in liturgy are imagination's expression of the depth of the divine/human relationship.

Greeley suggests the strength of the liturgical imagination is "rooted in the depths of the Catholic psyche with its ability to sense grace lurking everywhere."⁴⁵⁰ It is interesting that Greeley suggests Catholic participation in the fine arts is motivated by the participation in liturgy. Therefore, it is particularly appropriate to access the arts to engage

⁴⁴⁹ Thomas F. Dailey, "Playful Prayer: Imagination and the Task of Theology in Salesian perspective" June 15, 2015, web1.desales.edu/assets/DaileyPlayfulPrayer.pdf

⁴⁵⁰ Andrew Greeley, *The Catholic Imagination* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2001) 46.

the Catholic faithful in a greater appreciation of the meaning of the sacrament of Baptism as they interpret God's action as Jesus was baptized. There is no limitation to the possibilities imaginative members of the congregation would create if they are encouraged in their efforts.

Liturgical activity related to Baptism is not restricted to adult creativity. Often, the children are not present in the Church for the readings and the homily; they are invited to move to another location to hear the Word in language that is meaningful to the young. Either within the full assembly or in space designed specifically for children's liturgy, the Feast of the Baptism of the Lord is an excellent time for them to demonstrate what the immersion of Jesus in a river thousands of years ago means for the restoration of the earth's water. As the children hear the reading of the Word, the Bishop's Conference document explains, "all the elements that explain the readings should be given great consideration so that the children may make the biblical readings their own and may come more and more to appreciate the value of God's word."⁴⁵¹ Having worked closely with children for many years, I am confident they have the simplicity and imagination to move beyond accepted understanding to a new and insightful way of relating to Baptism and to the earth's water. Children are, by nature, imaginative. They seek divine presence on so many levels, many of which are no longer available in the adult world of reason. When left to their particular ability to imagine and to use their picture-making ability to create images of God, children are unsurpassable. Discussing children's participation in liturgy, The Bishop's Conference proposes, "there should be time after the gospel for reflection and discussion of the reading. This should involve the children's own experience. The reflection does not have to be

⁴⁵¹ Liturgy of the Word With Children, Bishop's Conference of England and Wales (London: Liturgy Office, 1996) 7

limited to words alone; silence, song, drama or other activity can all help the children understand the message of the scriptures and applying it to their lives and experience.”⁴⁵² Providing the opportunity for children to express their understanding of the gospel of Jesus’ Baptism can have a significant impact on the liturgical sense of the way God relates to humans through the created world.

Baptism Catechesis

The *General Directory for Catechesis* explains, “the definitive aim of catechesis is to put people not only in touch, but also in communion and intimacy, with Jesus Christ;”⁴⁵³ intimacy with God in Jesus Christ is so vital to the development of life-long commitment to God’s purpose for all God created. Continuing the formation begun on the celebration of the baptism of Jesus, the time given to parents and godparents as they prepare to baptize their children, is valuable to providing motivation for this commitment, and for laying the groundwork for a dialogue between the Church and the adults responsible for their children’s faith formation. Explaining the invitation inherent in sacramental catechesis, the *General Directory* says, “sacramental catechesis invites all to listen to God’s Word, to enter into a relationship with Christ, to accept his ongoing invitation to conversion, and to participate in the sacraments and in the life of the Church.”⁴⁵⁴

I heard the Church and the women speak about the meaning of Baptism, the Church emphasizing the consequence of initiating new members into a community of faith, while the women found meaning in the relationship their children enjoyed with God through the sacrament. Is there a conversation that can begin at this time that considers both valid

⁴⁵² Ibid., 14.

⁴⁵³ *General Directory for Catechesis*, “Catechesis, an essential moment in the process of evangelization” #80, June 30, 2015, www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/clergy/documents/rc_con_ccatheduc_doc_17041998_directory-for_catechesis_en.html.

⁴⁵⁴ Ibid.

expressions of faith - a conversation that does not begin with “because the Church says so?” Each of these viewpoints expresses a desire to know God in the world and to grow in faith through this knowledge. A conversation at this time makes room for both to be heard and each to learn from the other. This conversation begins when the parents gather to prepare for Baptism and continues within the community of faith after the children are baptized.

The initial preparation for Baptism is, typically, a half hour session in which parents are informed rather than formed. The *General Directory for Catechesis* explains that “initiatory catechesis, being comprehensive and systematic, cannot be reduced to the circumstantial or the occasional, as it is formational for the Christian life it comprises but surpasses mere instruction.”⁴⁵⁵ This very brief encounter cannot possibly provide the opportunity for the Church to share the wonder of the sacrament of Baptism, or the parents the time and space to express how family is touched by the sacramental grace. More meaningful for both is an evening in which members of the community are invited to participate with the parents as they all prepare for the children’s baptism. If the church truly believes Baptism initiates new members into this community of faith, invite the community in to welcome the families at the beginning of the process rather than expecting them to come forward once the celebration is over. Edward Kilmartin explains that “the sacraments enable the community as a whole to become an active subject responding to God and the individual subjects to identify themselves and take their proper place in the community of faith.”⁴⁵⁶ Structuring baptismal preparation as a community event rather than separating

⁴⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁶ Edward J. Kilmartin, “Theology of the Sacraments: Toward a New Understanding of the Chief Rites of the Church of Jesus Christ,” *Alternative Futures for Worship, Vol.1*, edited by Regis A. Duffy (Collegeville, MN: The Liturgical Press, 1987) 173.

potential members to experience catechetical formation with one person, usually a deacon, speaking and everyone else listening is not conducive to creating the community atmosphere baptism is meant to signify. When families of those seeking baptism meet baptized families and hear their stories, relationship begins and, hopefully, grows through involvement in the life of the parish. Bernard Cooke describes two interpretations of the word *community*: one refers to “a visible community of people with observable structures,”⁴⁵⁷ while the other refers to the activity of the people: “sharing their faith and their prayer and their Christian activity with one another is more basic.”⁴⁵⁸ When baptized members of the community of faith participate in family preparation the faith sharing begins before the new family is initiated through the sacrament. The family has exposure to the faith life of the community they are invited to join through Baptism. Sacramental catechesis thus becomes an opportunity to both form and inform “initiatorial catechesis is thus the necessary link between missionary activity which calls to faith and pastoral activity which continually nourishes the Christian community.”⁴⁵⁹ Sacramental catechesis is the moment in the life of a faith community to both form and inform, so that newly baptized families might be drawn into the pastoral and missionary activity that pastoral and missionary life a faith community that looks out into the world as well as inward to its

Community baptism preparation also provides time and space to consider the world’s water issues that concern every human person, especially people of faith who take seriously God’s mandate to care for all God has created. Listening again to the taped interviews with the women I was moved by their great appreciation for the family time

⁴⁵⁷ Bernard Cooke, *Sacraments and Sacramentality* (New London, CT: Twenty-Third Publications, 1994) 124.

⁴⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁵⁹ *General Directory for Catechesis*, “Catechesis, an essential moment in the process of evangelization” #65, June 30, 2015. www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/clergy/documents/.

water experiences afforded. As the women spoke of their love for water I was hopeful that they not only understood the need to protect this gift but to involve themselves in efforts to do so. Unfortunately, their memories of their experience with baptism preparation did not bring to mind any meaningful references to water, or any sense that the water that would be poured over their child is the same water that nourishes and sustains all life – physical and spiritual. Attention was not given to the symbol of water as the expression of God’s presence in the world God created – only that this water washes away sin. Water is too magnanimous a symbol to be confined to only one interpretation of its power. Community preparation opens the door to considering the full breadth of the symbol – the meaning that seemed evident when God “saw that it was good”⁴⁶⁰ The entire community of faith is invited to hear how water – the stuff of life – is blessed by God, holy in all its forms, and the paramount symbol of God’s gift of physical and spiritual life.

The church has certainly centered water as a symbol of divine life throughout its history, acknowledging it in scripture, in liturgy, and in Church doctrine. Water stories from scripture are the context within which *The Catechism of the Catholic Church* places instruction about the sacrament of Baptism. The Catechism declares: “Since the beginning of the world, water, so humble and wonderful a creature, has been the source of life and fruitfulness. Sacred Scripture sees it as “overshadowed” by the Spirit of God.”⁴⁶¹ The personalization of water that describes it as a *creature* reveals the deep love the Church has for water. Therefore if, during Baptism preparation, the community of faith has access to the Church’s disposition toward water – all water – they are given the opportunity to take in the meaning of this great gift of life God has given to creation, and to consider what that

⁴⁶⁰ *The Holy Bible: Catholic Study Edition* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2011) Genesis 1:10.

⁴⁶¹ *Catechism of the Catholic Church*, (Liguori, MO: Liguori Publications, 1994) 313.

means for the treatment of the world's water. I was so gratified to hear the mothers approve the inclusion of the relationship between the Earth's water and baptismal water in their time of preparation. How much more fully this relationship would be appreciated if preparation time included any members of the parish who chose to participate!

Adult Catechesis

A pastoral response that focuses on Baptism and Baptism preparation is central to my dissertation, but if that effort is exclusive of the majority of persons who make up parish life its impact is less sustainable. Therefore, I propose a pastoral strategy that acknowledges the gift of the recent papal encyclical through an adult faith formation series that explores the issues raised by Pope Francis that encourage care for our common home. Thomas Groome is a strong proponent of the need to continue religious education throughout life, rather than limiting it to children's faith formation. Commenting on the responsibility of religious educators Groome says, "the educator's task is far more than to teach the "content" of the faith tradition. Our task is to nurture people, with the help of God's grace, in their ability to *be* in faith. Being and becoming a person in Christian faith is a process of formation and maturation."⁴⁶² The church participates in the formation of adults not only as members of their faith communities but also for mature participation in the societies in which they live, work, and play. Involvement in the world they engage every day in ways that reflects their commitment to their religious faith is crucial to building up the reign of God in the world. Participation in God's purpose for creation is inherent in the effect of Baptism that opens the door to the sacred reality that God is present in all that exists, that God graces humans with the ability to see and imagine that presence,

⁴⁶² Thomas H. Groome, *Christian Religious Education: Sharing Our Story and Vision* (San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass, 1980) 66.

and that God expects a response to God's gracious act of creation and the divine/human relationship. Pope Francis calls the response thus far "weak." He writes,

Never have we so hurt and mistreated our common home as we have in the last two hundred years. Yet we are called to be instruments of God, our Father, so that our planet might be what he desired when he created it and correspond with his plan for peace, beauty, and fullness. The problem is that we still lack the culture needed to confront this crisis. We lack leadership capable of striking out on new paths and meeting the needs of the present with concern for all and without prejudice towards coming generations.⁴⁶³

The church has a responsibility to help form the leaders who will imagine the new paths that lead to fruitful responses to restore God's creation to the beauty God intended. The Spirit of God chooses those leaders, but adult faith formation fuels the fire that enables persons of faith to respond to the Spirit's urging. Pope Francis' encyclical provides a framework that presents the issues humans face and direction for a response that creates real transformation of current practices which continue to destroy God's creation. Through an adult formation series on Pope Francis' encyclical the faithful would hear the pope's appeal: "I urgently appeal, then, for a new dialogue about how we are shaping the future of our planet. We need a conversation which includes everyone, since the environmental challenge we are undergoing, and its human roots, concern and affect us all."⁴⁶⁴ I share Pope Francis' sense of urgency and hope and pray that many other Catholic faithful do as well.

⁴⁶³ Pope Francis, *'Laudato Si,' On Care for Our Common Home* (Huntington, IN: Our Sunday Visitor, 2015) 38.

⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 14.

Baptizing in the Earth's Water

One such response to Pope Francis' appeal is an authentic and honest reassessment of the celebration of the sacrament of Baptism within the Catholic community. A committed pastoral response to the concerns Pope Francis raises and the development of a culture that appreciates the dire consequences of ignoring these concerns questions the present practice of baptizing exclusively within the church building. The General Rules for baptism stipulates that "the proper place for administering solemn baptism is the baptistery in a church or public oratory."⁴⁶⁵ This excludes the possibility of celebrating the sacrament in the Earth's water sources, the water that God has blessed and called good. The rubric for the appropriate celebration of baptism specifies that the water to be used "is that which has been blessed on the preceding vigil of Easter and carefully preserved in a clean font to keep it pure."⁴⁶⁶ Such instruction suggests that any other water is less pure and blessed. It seems contradictory for the Church to both profess belief in the sacredness of all God has created and, at the same time, insist upon a human blessing the Earth's water in order to make it holy for the rite of baptism. This dichotomy prevents an authentic appreciation of the holiness of all water, and impedes Pope Francis' exhortation to create a culture which values creation for the gift it is to humankind. Baptism celebrated in oceans, rivers, streams, and springs confirms the truth that all water is holy.

These pastoral recommendations are reflections of the wisdom I gained through attention to the experiences of the women I interviewed, as well as the perspective I adopted when confronted with the evidence from culture and tradition. My cooperation

⁴⁶⁵ *Sancta Missa Rituale Romanum: Holy Baptism, General Rules*, Part II, chapter 1, #42, June 15, 2015, www.sanctamissa.org/en/resources/books-1962/rituale-romanum/07-the-sacrament-of-baptism-general-rules.html.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid*, #5.

with these sources raised my awareness of the relationship between the water of Baptism and the flowing water on earth that was created by God to sustain all life, and renewed my belief in humanity's responsibility to care for the earth. As a practical theologian, I trust theology to offer the insights and guidance to transform human attitudes and behaviors so that they more fully reflect God's vision and purpose.

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