

The Goodness of Creation - 5

Water is the Right of All Living Beings, Not Just of Humans

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It is remarkable that the UN Conference on water was held in New York from 22 to 24 March 2023, co-hosted by Tajikistan and the Netherlands, focusing upon the objectives of the Decade as laid out in the Secretary-General's Plan: Water Action Decade 2018-2028. I trust this Conference, as a Midterm Comprehensive Review of Implementation of the UN Decade for Action on Water and Sanitation (2018-2028), will be a turning point that prompts Member States and other partners, as well as the right-holders and stakeholders, to initiate innovative global initiatives and implement effective solutions. Further, I appreciate the 'Statement' issued before the Conference, which places water rights defenders and rights-holders at the forefront of all international, national, and local decision-making processes.

However, it seems that the Sustainable Development Goals of the UN (SDGs) are anthropocentric, focusing only on promoting human well-being and sustainable development. Although water is a human right, is it not also a fundamental right of all living beings? The statement ahead of the UN 2023 Water Conference (22-24 March) begins by stating that Water is a human right. The world is facing a looming global water crisis that threatens as increased demand for water and the intensifying impacts of the climate crisis put massive pressure on the water. By 2050, the number of people in cities facing water scarcity is projected to nearly double from 930 million people in 2016 to up to 2.4 billion.

SDG 6 stands for "Clean Water and Sanitation" and is one of the 17 Sustainable Development Goals established by the United Nations General Assembly in 2015. It aims to ensure access to safe water and sanitation for all people by 2030. SDG 6 is concerned with human beings only. There are arguments to counter this view. SDG 14 focuses on "Life Below Water," which aims to conserve and sustainably use marine and coastal ecosystems. This goal is relevant to conserving marine species and their habitats, such as coral reefs and sea turtles. Similarly, SDG 15 focuses on "Life on Land," which aims to protect, restore, and promote the sustainable use of terrestrial ecosystems. This goal is relevant to conserve land-based species and their habitats, such as forests and wildlife. Promoting sustainable agriculture (SDG 2) can help reduce deforestation and protect biodiversity (SDG 15), while reducing water pollution (SDG 6) can help

On the sixth day of creation, God created not only human beings but also all kinds of land animals, including cattle, wild animals, and creatures that move along the ground. Man is indeed one of the creations of God on the sixth day. The Bible describes humans as having a unique role and responsibility within creation, but it also acknowledges the value and significance of all other living beings. So, while humans are considered a special creation of God, they are not seen as separate from the rest of creation. Instead, they are part of a more extensive web of life, responsible for caring for and protecting the natural world that God has entrusted to us.

protect aquatic species (SDG 14). The idea that access to water is a human right is supported by various international declarations and agreements, including the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which recognises the right to an adequate standard of living, including access to water. The United Nations also recognises access to clean water and sanitation as a human right. This has been reaffirmed through various UN resolutions and agreements, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) do not explicitly mention the necessity of water for non-human animals and plants, and do not emphasise or project the water needed for other creations. From this, we get the wrong notion that this planet is exclusively for human beings. Water is the right of all life forms on this earth. Human beings are also part of the creation. The misconception that water is a human right is the reason for all wrong practices and water crises.

It is time to stop a technocratic approach to water. Water is essential for the survival and well-being of all living things, including humans, animals, and plants. Without access to water, living organisms cannot function properly and may eventually die. The people who frame the theory, that Water is a human right, are the advocates of the concept, Man is the crown of creation. We must recognise the intrinsic value of all life and reject the idea that humans have the right to dominate or exploit other living beings. According to the creation story in the book of Genesis in the Bible, after God created the heavens and the earth and all living creatures, God rested on the seventh day and declared it to be holy. This day of rest and worship is known as the Sabbath, and it is considered by some to be the pinnacle of God's



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creation. Eco-theological point of view, is that Sabbath is the crown of creation. On the sixth day of creation, God created not only human beings but also all kinds of land animals, including cattle, wild animals, and creatures that move along the ground. Man is indeed one of the creations of God on the sixth day. The Bible describes humans as having a unique role and responsibility within creation, but it also acknowledges the value and significance of all other living beings. So, while humans are considered a special creation of God, they are not seen as separate from the rest of creation. Instead, they are part of a more extensive web of life, responsible for, caring for, and protecting the natural world that God has entrusted to us.

All life-forms have inherent worth and should be treated with respect and compassion, regardless of their usefulness or value to humans. Humans are not separate from the natural world but are a part of it. It can also encourage people to consider their actions' ethical implications and seek a more harmonious relationship with the environment and other living beings. Human beings have no existence without animals and plants on the earth. We depend on the natural world for our

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survival, including the air we breathe, the water we drink, and the food we eat.

The concept of water as a right of all living things, is not currently enshrined in international law or human rights declarations. A movement should emerge for the growing recognition of the need to prioritise the conservation and sustainable use of water resources for the benefit of all living beings. Ensuring access to water for all living beings requires a more holistic approach to water management that considers the needs of humans and the environment. This may involve reducing water pollution, improving water-use efficiency, and protecting and restoring water-related ecosystems.

The "Integrity of Creation" is often used in discussions about environmental ethics, sustainability, and religious teachings. At its core, the concept refers to the idea that the natural world is inherently valuable and should be respected and protected for its own sake, regardless of its instrumental value to humans. The concept of the Integrity of Creation is often associated with the Judeo-Christian tradition, which emphasises the importance of stewardship and responsibility towards the natural world. However, the idea is also in many other religious and philosophical traditions worldwide, including Buddhism, Taoism, and Indigenous spiritualities. Promoting the Integrity of Creation often involves adopting more sustainable and environmentally responsible practices, such as reducing carbon emissions, conserving natural resources, protecting biodiversity, and promoting social justice and equity. It also requires a shift in the values and attitudes towards the natural world, recognising its inherent value and interconnectedness with all living beings. Water is an essential component of the natural world and is critical to

the Integrity of Creation. It is a finite resource that sustains all living beings and is crucial in many ecosystems, including rivers, lakes, oceans, and wetlands. However, it is also true that access to water is essential for other living beings' survival and for maintaining healthy ecosystems.

Ecojustice is a concept that emphasises the interconnectedness of all life and recognises that environmental issues cannot be separated from social justice concerns. When it comes to water, ecojustice emphasises the importance of protecting and conserving this vital resource for the well-being of all living beings. The right of the water is to flow, it is a cyclic rhythmic flow from the mountains to land, valleys, ocean, sky and mountains. The living creations can use the water during their rhythmic cyclic movement. All creations in nature accept the intrinsic value of water and interconnectedness. Healthy ecosystems rely on a complex web of animals, plants, bacteria, and fungi—all of which interact, directly or indirectly, with each other. Harm to any of these organisms can create a chain effect, imperilling the entire life on this earth.

Climate change is primarily a water crisis. We feel its impacts through frequent floods, rising sea levels, shrinking ice fields, wildfires and droughts. Sustainable water management is central to building the resilience of societies and ecosystems and to reducing carbon emissions. Water is also at the heart of adaptation to climate change, serving as the crucial link between society and the environment.

Recognising the valuable contributions and knowledge of Indigenous Peoples, peasants, and local communities regarding water management and conservation is essential. These groups often have a deep understanding of local aquatic ecosystems and have developed sustainable practices over generations that should be considered while designing policies related to water usage. Water is not only a human right but a fundamental right of all living beings. It is important to recognise the interconnectedness of all living beings and ecosystems when developing policies related to water usage. Ensuring the sustainability of the water agenda is not only necessary for human survival but also for the survival of all other species that depend on water.