



Missionary Society of St. Columban

JUSTICE, PEACE, AND INTEGRITY OF CREATION

For I shall pour out water on the thirsty soil and streams on the dry ground; I shall pour out my Spirit on your descendants, my blessing on your offspring. Isaiah 44:3

The entire material universe speaks of God's love, his boundless affection for us. Soil, water, mountains: everything is, as it were, a caress of God.

Pope Francis, Laudato Si, par. 84

The principle of the universal destination of goods also applies naturally to water, considered in the Sacred Scriptures as a symbol of purification and of life.

Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, par. 484

Columban missionaries are called to heal, reconcile, build bridges and create mutual understanding through dialogue and our solidarity with marginalized people and the exploited Earth.

Missionary Society of St Columban, 2012 General Assembly

Water

Water has spiritual, ethical, symbolic and cultural meanings that are integral to our identity as children of God. "Whoever drinks of the water that I will give him shall never thirst; but the water that I will give him will become in him a well of water springing up to eternal life" (Jn 14:4). We observe how human behavior impacts all of God's creation, especially including water. Our experience, Scripture, Catholic Social Teaching, and science impel us to seek ways to restore right relationships with all of Creation.

As a result of insights gained from creation-centered theology, we realize that human behavior must include our relationship with all creation, especially water. Recognizing the essential and sacred place of water in all of Creation, we strive for ongoing ecological conversion which leads to both personal and institutional change.

Columban Concerns

Water is a Human Right

According to the Catholic Church, the right to water, as all human rights, finds its basis in human dignity and not in any kind of merely quantitative assessment that considers water as a merely economic good. Without water, life is threatened. Therefore, the right to safe drinking water is a universal and inalienable right¹. However, we see how health, nutrition, and sanitation are impacted by inadequate water access and quality, especially on poor communities, women and children.

In Pakistan, for example, tests commissioned by Columbans carried out in villages where hand pumps are used to access underground water for drinking and cooking purposes, showed that the levels of phosphates, sulphates and arsenic were 4-8 times higher than the European Union recommended safety level².

¹ Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church. Par 485.

² For more information about this study, contact Amy Woolam Echeverria: amywe@columban.org



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As access to water for human consumption decreases, the use and pollution of water increases by industries such as mining³ and agribusiness. Water usage must, at all stages, be taken into account in planning for a sustainable future. This concept is known as 'virtual water'. Examples of goods that demand high levels of water for their extraction and production include: minerals, metals, natural gas, meat, soya, oil seed, cotton, rice, coffee and cocoa. Changes in lifestyle, public policy, and corporate operations are needed to restore balance to issues of water quality and access for the health and well-being of all of Creation.

Climate Change and Water

The world's water crisis and climate change are intrinsically linked. One impact of higher temperatures is the melting of inland glaciers. This will increase water supply to rivers and lakes in the short to medium term, but will cease once these glaciers have melted. As rivers are increasingly polluted and/or dry up, access to irrigation for small-scale and subsistence farming is jeopardized. In the sub-tropics, climate change is likely to lead to reduced rainfall in what are already dry regions. The overall effect is an intensification of the water cycle that causes increased frequency of more extreme floods and droughts.

We see first-hand the relationship between climate change and water. For example, the 2013 Haiyan typhoon in the Philippines is an example of how climate change is generating storms of greater intensity and frequency, destroying homes and lives and increasing the dependency of survivors on international relief efforts to gain access to potable water. In Fiji, Columbans are concerned about rising sea levels and salinization of water as a result of climate change. In Peru, Columbans see the impact of melting glaciers on the long-term water prospects of cities such as Lima.

A Threat to Peace

Water is a strategic factor for the establishment and maintenance of peace in the Middle East and other conflicted parts of the world⁴. For example, there are an estimated 260 rivers which flow through two countries or more of which only a handful have signed treaties regulating their respective access to the water⁵. As a result, competition between adjacent countries for access to water resources can contribute to hostilities and violence. Water shortages threaten food production and energy supply and thus put additional stress on governments struggling with poverty and social tensions.

Similarly, increased militarization and military bases, places demands on water supplies through resource extraction for weapon production and warfare technology. In Korea, Columbans have joined the Korean Catholic bishops and activists of other faiths in challenging the establishment of a military base on Jeju Island⁶, known as the 'Island of Peace'. The construction and operation of the base has

³ See Society Statement on Extractive Industries: <http://www.columbans.co.uk/news/jpic-policy-statements-of-the-columban-missionary-society/>

⁴ Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, "Water: An Essential Element for Life". 2006: http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20060322_mexico-water_en.html

⁵ Dr William Reville, "Water, water everywhere, but not for everyone," May 15th 2000, Irish Times: <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/water-water-everywhere-but-not-for-everyone-1.271050>

⁶ Save Jeju Now: <http://savejejunow.org/>



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resulted in the destruction of the pristine environment including the contamination of its fresh and marine waters on the island.

Economic Globalization and Privatization of Water

The privatization, commodification, trade and export of water can be seen as a violation of the Catholic principles of universal destination of goods and care for creation.⁷ The privatization of water often disregards the rights and needs of humans and all living things because the environment is not factored into the commercial equation. Water privatization has had consequences such as: less access to water for the poor, extremely high tariffs, and poor water quality.

The predominant current economic vision of unlimited growth and free trade is incompatible with the search for solutions to water scarcity. International trade policies have established water as a private commodity which often leads to inequitable distribution. Water is made to serve investors and private sectors through global trade and investment agreements. The World Bank and regional financial institutions condition their loans on privatization and increased cost recovery, which often requires charging water fees to those who can least afford it.⁸

Columban Response

Solidarity with Local Communities

Columbans live and work in communities where access to quality water is limited due to economic and environmental policies and practices. We support local communities by assisting in education and mobilization activity, and connecting with our international community via advocacy and other solidarity efforts. For example, in the Philippines, the **Negros Nine Foundation**, a Columban project, conserves local water supplies, plants trees, and aims to bring back the native species of plants, birds and animals that have all but disappeared. At the border between the U.S. and Mexico, an interfaith organization supported by the Columbans, 'Water Captains', is addressing policies of the local government so that economically-challenged communities have adequate access to water.

Advocacy for change

We are committed to working for structural change as part of an integrated strategy for addressing the root causes of economic and environmental injustice. Through dialogue with government agencies, public policy makers and corporations we seek to impact systemic change as well as empower impacted communities to tell their own stories through advocacy and education. For example, in the United States, the **Columban Center for Advocacy and Outreach** (CCAO) has called for national and international policies that protect water and ensure access to clean water for all people such as the *Water for the World Act* which ensures US funding and resource for global water projects.

⁷Compendium of the Social Doctrine of the Church, par 484.

⁸ Maude Barlow, Senior advisor on water to the 63rd President of the UN General Assembly, leading up to the decision by the General Assembly in 2010 to declare water and sanitation a human right. See her trilogy, *Blue Gold* (New York: *The New Press*, 2005), *Blue Covenant* (New York, *The New Press*, 2009), and *Blue Future* (New York, *The New Press*, 2013).



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In 2013, the *Columban Justice, Peace, and Integrity of Creation Office* in Chile played a leading role in organizing the “Earth Week March and Carnival to Recuperate Water Rights” in Santiago. More than 100 organizations and 6000 people participated in the peaceful ten-mile march to demand that the state regain control of the management of water, which was privatized by the Pinochet dictatorship in 1981. The protestors called for an end to private ownership of water and greater environmental protection.

Interreligious Cooperation

We seek out people and groups of other faith traditions who are actively involved in environmental issues, including Water. These interreligious and ecumenical partnerships increase the effectiveness, conviction, and credibility of our efforts. For example, in Australia, the ***Columban Peace, Ecology and Justice Centre*** coordinates with the ***Faith and Ecology Network***⁹ which has held a forum on water, produced an interfaith statement on water and participated in rallies, including the ‘Walk for Water’ to protect Sydney’s water supply from mining. Columbans have also hosted an interfaith workshop on water issues at the ***Columban Mission Center*** in El Paso, Texas, USA, with the participation of the Interfaith Alliance of El Paso¹⁰.

Faith Formation and Education

Inviting people and communities of faith to understand and act on social and environmental issues through the lens of Catholic Social Teaching is an integral part of Columban mission. Formation happens in a variety of contexts including parishes, schools, universities, mission centers, short term mission service, and online and print publications. For example, in Britain, Columban JPIC has run a number of workshops on Water, including one at the National Justice and Peace Conference of England and Wales in July 2014. In Chile, Columbans are members of the ***Coalición Ecu mica por el Cuidado de la Creaci n*** which has Water as one of its priorities and conducts workshops and issues informative papers of a range of environmental concerns.

Socially and Environmentally Responsible Investing (SRI)

As a Missionary Society we are called upon to use the resources entrusted to us for the life of the world.¹¹ We believe our investment policy is an important dimension of our missionary charism which offers a Christian witness in the business community. Columban membership of the U.S.- based ***Interfaith Center for Corporate Responsibility*** and participation in the UK-based ***Ecumenical Center for Corporate Responsibility*** serve as outlets for our wider engagement in Socially Responsible Investment and Corporate Advocacy.

Publications / Raising awareness

Through online and print publications, Columbans invite critical thinking, action and prayerful reflection. The following are examples:

- Sean McDonagh, SSC,
 - *To Care for the Earth* (1986),
 - *Passion for the Earth* (1994),

⁹ Faith Ecology Network: <http://faithecology.net.au/>

¹⁰ Interfaith Alliance of El Paso: <http://www.ifaep.org/>

¹¹ 2012 Columban General Assembly, *Called to Communion*, p.17.



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- *The Greening of the Church* (1996),
 - *Why Are We Deaf to the Cry of the Earth?* (2003),
 - *Dying for Water* (2003),
 - *The Death of Life* (2004),
 - *Climate Change* (2006),
 - *Fukushima: The End of Nuclear Energy?* (2013).
- Charles Rue, SSC, *Let the Son Shine*, 2013
 - Britain - **Philippines: Mining or Food Report** - <http://www.piplinks.org/miningorfood> . The report includes data on the destruction of watersheds through large-scale mining.
 - Australia – **Lenten Reflection: Grace of the Earth** which includes sections on Water and Oceans. <http://www.columban.org.au/assets/files/pej/columbanmissionthegraceofearth.pdf>
 - The **Columban Creation Covenant**¹² offers guidelines to Columban missionaries in our effort to value water and reduce our water footprint as part of our commitment to our ongoing ecological conversion.

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¹² For a copy of the Creation Covenant contact Amy Woolam Echeverria