



YOUNG INTERNATIONAL NETWORK OF CENTESIMUS ANNUS PRO PONTIFICE



Blue Gold in our Common Home

International Perspectives on the Role of Water

The YIN of CAPP Contribution to the 2019 CAPP International Conference

How much water is needed to produce food?

Food (1kg)					
Water consumption (in liters)	17,196	15,415	5,988	4,325	1,608
Food (1kg)			 (250ml)	 (250ml)	 (250ml)
Water consumption (in liters)	822	790	255	109	74

Sources: Institution of Mechanical Engineers, the Guardian

Background of the Young International Network

In 2018 the board of Fondazione Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice (CAPP) established the Young International Network (YIN). It comprises CAPP members up to and including 35 years. The primary aim of YIN is to bring together and grow this group of younger members, to raise interest for and knowledge of the Catholic Social Doctrine and to contribute to the work of CAPP.

On this discussion paper

This is the second discussion paper of YIN and has been prepared for the 2019 International Conference of CAPP. It provides thoughts, remarks and suggestions raised in relation to the themes of this year's International Conference. This contribution focuses on the role of 'blue gold' in our personal lives and in our current day economy.

1 Introduction

Water, it is a substantial part of all that's living, and covers over 70% of the earth's surface. To put it short, water is everywhere. In this paper, YIN of CAPP¹ elaborates on the ideas of awareness and protection, going beyond the obvious economic and ecologic lens while incorporating a perspective from Young Christians. Furthermore, water has always been important, so why address this now?

Water plays a critical role in our ecology, economy, our cultural lives, and, in particular for Christians, also in religious lives. Practically, for many of us, it is most simply available every time you open the water tap. The so-called 'blue gold' is an integral and many times underestimated part in our lives. Pope Francis tantalizes us, alarms us and calls us to action for our Common Home in his encyclical *Laudato Sí*.² Already at the beginning, he states that *'we have come to see ourselves as her [Mother Earth, YIN] lords and masters, entitled to plunder her at will. (...) We have forgotten that we ourselves are dust of the earth (cf. Gen 2:7); our very bodies are made up of her elements, we breathe her air and we receive life and refreshment from her waters.'*³

As young Christians, we have come to realize the multifaceted role that water plays for all life on earth. Over the past months, we have worked together and discussed the issue of water. We looked into the current state of play.⁴ Based on local reports from YIN members⁵ and our valuable (digital) encounters, we argue for more solidarity together with awareness and protection of the availability of this core ecological, economical and spiritual resource.⁶

2 The issue of water in the context of *Laudato Sí*

The Pope observes that industrialization and worldwide economic use of resources, enabled humanity to greatly enhance living conditions. But often, these new developments do not benefit everyone. Their negative consequences are often felt most by the ones already worse off.⁷ A current consequence of such an unjust use of resources is what Pope Francis calls the global water crisis. For instance, despite a UN resolution recognizing the human right to water and sanitation, there are – as reported by some international organizations – still some 2,5 billion people (in 2015) that have no adequate access to clean drinking water.⁸

In *Laudato Sí*, Pope Francis devotes a separate chapter on the issue of water, in which the availability of fresh drinking water is pointed out as: *'indispensable for human life and for supporting terrestrial and aquatic ecosystems.'*⁹ Its absence, 'water poverty', is particularly affecting the populations living

¹ For more info on YIN, see our brief presentation [here](#).

² Encyclical Letter *Laudato Sí* of the Holy Father Francis on Care for our Common Home (*Laudato Sí*), 24 June 2015, available at: http://w2.vatican.va/content/dam/francesco/pdf/encyclicals/documents/papa-francesco_20150524_enciclica-laudato-si_en.pdf.

³ *Laudato Sí*, at 2.

⁴ See for instance, Tom Slaymaker and Robert Bain, 'Access to drinking water around the world – in five infographics', *Guardian*, 17 March 2017, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development-professionals-network/2017/mar/17/access-to-drinking-water-world-six-infographics>. But also, University of York, Antibiotics found in some of the world's rivers exceed 'safe' levels, global study finds', 27 May 2019, available at: <https://www.york.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/2019/research/antibiotics-found-in-some-of-worlds-rivers/>.

⁵ The local reports are an annex to this report and are available [online](#).

⁶ The Pope calls for more awareness on the issue of water he states: *'the problem of water is partly an educational and cultural issue, since there is little awareness of the seriousness of such behaviour [wasting water, YIN] within a context of great inequality'* (*Laudato Sí*, at 30).

⁷ *Laudato Sí*, at 48.

⁸ World Health Organisation, Fact Sheet on Drinking-Water, available at: www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheet/details/drinking-water.

⁹ *Laudato Sí*, Chapter II, The Issue of Water, and at 28. The impact of water extends beyond fresh drinking water, such as is explored in *Laudato Sí*, at 31, 37, 40, 41, and 48. Here, the Pope refers for instance to: potential conflicts over scarce amounts of fresh drinking water, protection of water reserves, the oceans' biodiversity, coral reefs, water pollution, and the rise of sea the level. *Laudato Sí* is not the first time that the Catholic Church has expressed her concerns about the use of water and emphasized a more holistic approach, consider for instance: Water, an Essential Element for Life, Note Prepared

in Africa.¹⁰ The Pope stresses that *'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.'*¹¹ As a consequence, depriving others and in particular the poor from fresh drinking water is denying them their *'right to a life consistent with their inalienable dignity'*.¹²

On the fourth World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, Pope Francis focused his attention on the issue of water, as a primary asset to be protected and made available to all. The protection of this *'blue gold'* has been at the center of the Pope's concern for some time. He reiterated the importance of water that has *'given us life'* and that is often polluted. Echoing the encyclical *Laudato Sí*, here the Pope spoke of the corruption of creation, when human pride through exploitation destroys it.¹³

'The issue of water' is a key element of *Laudato Sí*. In this encyclical, the issue of water is presented as two-fold. Firstly, the amount of water consumed is highly asymmetrical, where wealthier and more developed parts of the world do not consume water sustainably and exploit the earth's limited resources.¹⁴ Secondly, access to safe drinking water is not guaranteed in wide parts of the developing world. The greatest impact of this unavailability of water is onto the poorest. And when water is available, many times it is found to be polluted by industrial processes, chemicals and waste, unsustainable agriculture or mining activities¹⁵. Access to clean water is of primary concern for the ecological system of the earth. Humanity depends on it, directly as a resource, but also indirectly through agriculture, industry and production. Even more important, water is the resource uniting the different living organisms of nature and the natural ecosystem as a whole, *'we live and act on the basis of a reality which has previously been given to us'*.¹⁶ In *Laudato Sí* and afterwards, the Pope emphasized that water should not be simply turned in to a commodity by privatization, since access to water is a human right.¹⁷

3 Human values at stake

The abovementioned issues relate well to the paper by Pedro Arrojo Agudo, titled *'Global Water Crisis: Values and Rights at Stake'*. He suggests a more practical approach to deal with the issue of water, this approach may help to follow up on the call made by the Pope in *Laudato Sí*. The first point he makes is that water should not be discussed as a resource, but instead viewed in a larger systemic view as part of a whole ecosystem, both in economical as well as ecological terms. Secondly, he acknowledges the privatization of water as one of the factors leading to an unsustainable use of water. He argues that markets have shown not to be successful in taking into account the complex set of values that come with water. For instance, sustainable water management and usage is not welcomed or appreciated by the system, since externalities are not accounted for. Third, water needs to be viewed as a basic human right instead of a resource. Guaranteeing universal access for everyone should be a goal of the global society.¹⁸

by the Pontifical Council for Justice and Peace, A Contribution of the Delegation of the Holy See on the Occasion of the Third World Water Forum, 22 March 2003, available at:

http://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/pontifical_councils/justpeace/documents/rc_pc_justpeace_doc_20030322_kyoto-water_en.html. But also, the Watershed conferences co-organized by the Vatican on 22 March 2017; see: <http://worldwatervalues.org/>.

¹⁰ *Laudato Sí*, at 28.

¹¹ *Laudato Sí*, at 30 and 185.

¹² *Laudato Sí*, at 30.

¹³ Message of Pope Francis at the occasion of the fourth World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, 1 September 2018, available at: <https://www.vaticannews.va/en/pope/news/2018-09/pope-francis-care-for-water-is-urgent-imperative.html>.

¹⁴ *Laudato Sí*, at 27.

¹⁵ *Laudato Sí*, at 29.

¹⁶ *Laudato Sí*, at 28 and 140.

¹⁷ *Laudato Sí*, at 30, Message of Pope Francis of 22 March 2019 at the Occasion of the World Water Day 2019, available at: http://w2.vatican.va/content/francesco/en/messages/pont-messages/2019/documents/papa-francesco_20190322_messaggio-giornatamondiale-acqua.html.

¹⁸ Pedro Arrojo Agudo, *'Global Water Crisis: Values and Rights at Stake'*, 2010.

The responsibility is ours

The creation, created perfectly for all of mankind has been given to us as stewards, to protect and develop: *'till it and keep it'* (Gen 2:15) for the flourishing of mankind. Man has, however, oftentimes overstepped the limitations of nature, extorting the natural habitat more than nurturing it and gently extracting what it gives.¹⁹ Instead, the biblical motif of Genesis has to be read with the understanding that we should cultivate and preserve what has been given to us.²⁰ And the responsibility to keep things together is our foremost responsibility. The encyclical mentions that the environment is a common good. Preserving it is the responsibility of all humans.²¹

Specifically, on the issue of water, we are called to protect water and ensure safe access to drinking water – an essential human right, necessary for human survival and a requirement for the exercise of all other human and civil rights.²² To this end, the YIN of CAPP members have been studying this theme in both their local context as well as the global one, creating reports (attached)²³ bringing together different views and perceptions on water.

Examining the various national local reports, it emerges that water consumption habits in Western nations are different. It depends mainly on these factors: habits, degree of responsibility of citizens, condition of water infrastructures and geographical location (the latter is closely related to the climate). Overall, no shortages of drinking water were mentioned (which may illustrate that compared to the less developed countries an imbalance in favor of the richer and more powerful countries), but decreasing amounts of rain raise concerns for droughts.

4 The current situation

The injustices identified earlier are the consequence of a natural resource which has been privatized in many places, turned into a good which is controlled by the laws of the market – supply and demand. Markets have succeeded in many ways, but struggle in delivering a good way to integrate *externalities* into the pricing of goods.²⁴

This happens when markets do not account for the real cost of a good. This cost should not be just based on a monetary value, but should reflect the greater cost on society, as affirmed by CAPP in its 2019 Statement: *'The real cost of environmental damage should be calculated and reflected transparently in the price of industrial or service products, to stop unjust socialization or the transfer of hidden cost to the next generations.'*²⁵ Here, the dimension of this cost onto future generations is also introduced.

Additionally, the commodification of water ignores the fact that it is *'essential to human survival'* and therefore a prerequisite for all other human and civil rights.²⁶ The control over water supply in private hands gives a small group of people power over a larger one, since individual consumer rights tend not work in a the context of monopolies.²⁷ We should recognize that the market has limitations

¹⁹ Laudato Sí, at 66.

²⁰ Laudato Sí, at 67

²¹ Laudato Sí, at 95.

²² Laudato Sí, at 30, and see also: Message of Pope Francis at the occasion of the fourth World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, 1 September 2018.

²³ The local reports are available [online](#).

²⁴ Pedro Arrojo Agudo, *'Global Water Crisis: Values and Rights at Stake'*, 2010, at 1.1, available at:

<https://www.cristianismeijusticia.net/en/global-water-crisis-values-and-rights-stake>.

²⁵ Centesimus Annus Pro Pontifice Foundation, 2019 Statement, Ethics for an Age of “New Things”: Responsibility, Creativity and Personal Engagement in the Digital Age, 2019, at 9. Available at: <http://www.centesimusannus.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/2019-STATEMENT.pdf>.

²⁶ Laudato Sí, at 30.

²⁷ Pedro Arrojo Agudo, *'Global Water Crisis: Values and Rights at Stake'*, 2010, at 1.2.

and the current situation should be addressed with a more holistic approach. Technology and money are not the only answer to our problems.²⁸

Furthermore, the fact that water is wasted in some parts of the world, while not available in other parts shows that the consequences of these actions are not fully understood – either due to lack of education about them or lack of care.²⁹ The excess usage of water has consequences for everyone, even though these effects might not be seen directly or even at all.

5 A new framework of thought for a solution - An integral ecology

Recalling the Lord's words spoken from the cross – *'I thirst'* (Jn 19:28), Pope Francis reminds us that the Lord is still asking for his thirst be quenched today in the poor amongst us: *'He asks us to give him to drink in all those who thirst in our own day, and to say to them, "I was thirsty and you gave me to drink" (Mt 25:35). To give to drink, in the global village, does not only entail personal gestures of charity, but also concrete choices and a commitment to ensure to all the primary good of water.'*³⁰

To do this, Pope Francis suggests looking at integral ecology. This requires us to think of the issue of water not as a separate problem, but rather a case of overall disharmony between humans and their environment.³¹ Integral ecology means to look for a comprehensive solution for how mankind and the environment interact together, which then leads to solutions for the specific issues at stake.

One part of integral ecology is the principle of the common good. It is best understood as *'the sum of all living conditions required for everyone to lead a respectful life and find personal fulfillment.'*³² It relates also to the principle of distributive justice and therefore focuses on the needs of those worst off. A specific focus is given to intergenerational justice and the respect for future generations in the encyclical. Especially, taking into account the state of ecology when new generations will take responsibility requires us right now to take action and care for our Common Home.³³ In this regard, consumerism and individualism have put us on a wrong path. However, more solidarity can be the force behind reaching this common good.

6 A practical line of action

In a practical way, Arrojo Agudo suggests achieving this through the separation of functional levels of a good before releasing it to the forces of the market.

(i) Water-life

For goods such as water, which are integral to human society, nature and the ecosystem as a whole, the first functional level is Water-life. This level encompasses all basic survival functions, not only for humans but for every living creature and ecosystem (in terms of sustainability). Establishing direct and safe access to drinking water is one of the first common goals in societies. And this has always been viewed as something society provides for itself. Arrojo Agudo mentions that for this level of providing water, only its effectiveness is essential, not how efficient it is.

(ii) Water-Citizenship

The second level is Water-Citizenship. Now, people and the ecosystem have already been provided with enough water to ensure their survival. This level focuses instead on the *civic* water requirements

²⁸ As most recently reiterated in the Letter of His Holiness Pope Francis to Young Economists and Entrepreneurs Worldwide, 1 May 2019, available at:

<http://press.vatican.va/content/salastampa/it/bollettino/pubblico/2019/05/11/0399/00815.html#ing>.

²⁹ Laudato Sí, at 31.

³⁰ Message of Pope Francis at the occasion of the fourth World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, 1 September 2018,.

³¹ Laudato Sí, at 139.

³² Laudato Sí, at 156.

³³ Laudato Sí, at 159.

including e.g. supply and sanitation. Public institutions aim to ensure such citizen's rights, but in a social context, citizens should have duties to make sure that such rights remain available to all.

(iii) Water-Economy

This relates to using water beyond the basic availability of water needed for humans, but used to improve the quality of life. It comes into play when natural and societal requirements for water have been fulfilled. Unless the previous water requirements have been solved, the sources of water should not be under sole control of the market. This is the level of Water-Economy.

The issue of water

These three principles give a structure of how the relationship between water and market could be governed. It is important to stress that economic growth should not come at an ecological cost, which as we have already seen is born primarily by those who do not enjoy the fruits of such growth.

In light of this, we acknowledge that a solution to the water issue does not lie solely in regulating the market economy. It also requires a change of heart of each of us to make the necessary changes in our life to eradicate those choices which arise from our selfishness and greed. As *Gaudium et Spes* reminds us, this *'cannot occur unless individual men and their associations cultivate in themselves the moral and social virtues, and promote them in society; thus, with the needed help of divine grace men who are truly new and artisans of a new humanity can be forthcoming.'*³⁴

7 On blue gold

The Pope's prayer is that water must not be a sign of separation between peoples, but one of meeting for the community.³⁵ We join him in this prayer and support his call for more awareness on the essential role of the water. The issue of water is not easily resolved, however, flowing from our discussions we wish to make a few suggestions:

Solidarity is needed to ensure intergenerational justice and the respect for future generations. Therefore, also more awareness of the issue of water should be raised at different levels. This includes those levels pointed out by Arrojo Agudo (water-life, water-citizenship and water-economy), but also considering both global and more local levels. This should help us to find an integral approach.

As suggested by Pope Francis, education is key in increasing awareness. Practically, more attention in materials and courses on Catholic Social Doctrine may be given to *Laudato Sí* including the issue of water. Also, more room may be given to inspiring examples from around the globe that really aim to improve the availability of water.³⁶

To conclude, the Pope has invited young economists, entrepreneurs and change-makers to make the economy of today and tomorrow fair, sustainable and inclusive, with no one left behind. This event is called 'The Economy of Francesco' and will take place in March 2020 in Assisi (Italy).³⁷ Such encounters will hopefully bring new perspectives, and we hope it will be embraced also by current economic leaders and society to support the development of new economic models promoting an integral approach of dealing with water.

³⁴ *Gaudium et Spes*, at 30.

³⁵ Message of Pope Francis at the occasion of the fourth World Day of Prayer for the Care of Creation, 1 September 2018.

³⁶ For instance, we observed: The Drinkable Book (paper water filters enabling to make clean water out of contaminated water, see also: <https://waterislife.com>), the Ocean Clean Up (an initiative to remove plastic from the oceans, see also: www.theoceancleanup.com),³⁶ IRC Wash (think-and-do-tank on water matters, see also: <https://www.ircwash.org/home>), Auara (a social enterprise financing water projects to improve access to safe water, see also: <https://auara.org/?lang=en>), and Wase Tech (providing systems for decentralized wastewater treatment, see also: <http://www.wase-tech.com>).

³⁷ The event called 'Economy of Francesco' will be organized in Assisi from 26-28 March 2019. See also: www.francescoeconomy.org.