

A Sustainable Environment: Our Obligation to Protect God's Gift

By
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Water is Our Most Critical Environmental Issue

The environmental issue that is in the media more than any other is that of climate change. And there is no doubt that it is a critical issue. However, I have said for a number of years that the quantity and quality of water necessary for the planet's population is decreasing. This is due to a combination of the declining water sources and the increasing population.

While water shortages have been a bigger concern of the developing nations, it is now affecting many of the large cities in the world. The best example is what is happening in Cape Town, South Africa. This city of four million people is running out of water. The citizens are currently limited to 13 gallons of water per day, and that amount may be reduced to six gallons per day by July 1, 2018. This water problem is the result of three years of drought, poor planning by the city's administration and poor crisis management. Many of the town's citizens are leaving the city to find areas that have water.

Worldwide, there are many other large cities running out of water. Sao Paulo, Brazil, with a population of 22 million, had less than 20 days of water supply a few years ago, and now it is not much better. Bangalore, India has a problem due to its population growth compounded with the pollution of the lakes that make the water not drinkable. In Beijing, China, its water sources are so polluted that the water cannot even be used for agriculture or industry. The Nile River provides 97% of the water for Egypt, but it is also polluted and is causing a major problem for Cairo. In Jakarta, Indonesia over 50% of the population do not have water piped to their homes so they have to dig wells for their supply. Istanbul, Turkey is another city where its water supply is polluted and the same applies to Mexico City and London which have polluted water supplies. And Tokyo has a major water problem as it depends on precipitation for its supply but it only rains about four months per year.

The U.S. is not immune to this kind of water problem in major cities. Right here in one of the most advanced countries, there is a major water problem coming upon us in Miami where the reservoirs are being polluted because of the rising sea level. Miami Beach has already embarked on a water protection plan employing some the technologies developed in The Netherlands, a country that is doing well despite its landscape being well below sea level.

The citizens in the Midwest and Northeast of the U.S. are really spoiled because they live near the Great Lakes which represent about 20% of all the available fresh water in the world. Yet this source of fresh water supplies the needs of about 40 million people or 0.5% of the world's population. While climate change is more of a global issue, water quantity and quality is a local issue. And for that reason many people are not concerned with the issue if they currently don't have a problem. Even though it being primarily a local issue, we need to make it global, and then everyone will be concerned and contribute to its resolution.

We must become aware of actions that we can take to preserve whatever amount of water that is available to each of us. Following some of the actions of the circular economy, there are numerous ways that water can be used more than once; that is, use the waste water from one application to fulfill the requirement for another application. A good example is to use the waste water from a bathroom sink to fill the toilet tank for flushing. In some European countries you will find men's urinals with a wash sink right above the urinal so the waste water from washing one's hands flows down to flush the urinal. Why use fresh clean water? Also, in many countries that have a water source issue, dual flush toilets are the norm so less water is used to flush down liquids.

I am also opposed to bottled water as there are no health benefits of bottled water over that of tap water in most U.S. cities. Besides the cost of bottled water being about 400 times the cost of tap water, there is also the issue of the amount of water needed to produce the plastic bottle. Reports indicate that it takes two to three times as much water to produce the bottle as the amount of water contained in the bottle. So if you are drinking 12 ounces of water from a plastic bottle, you will have consumed 36 to 48 ounces of water.

These activities and other comparable ones cannot continue if we are going to provide a healthy environment for our future generations.