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Martha Moore-Keish's reflection, "Common Waters: Global water crisis and Christian baptism," provides much to ponder and points in several directions for deeper thinking, conversation, and action. The article makes connections between water's role in our baptisms and global water issues in helpful ways. The three insights, rooted in our understanding and experience of baptism that Christians might bring to the current conversations about water seem particularly important for the issues addressed in the reflection and for some additional water-related issues. Consider two areas for further reflection related to the insights identified in Dr. Moore-Keish's article.

1. Baptism orients us to new creation, in which the barriers that separate us are washed away.

Access to water means access to opportunities and possibilities. Women and children serve as the primary water-gatherers in most countries where access to clean water is not immediately at hand. This requires trips to and from the source of water. To bring clean water to the people frees their time and allows women the possibility of working outside the home and/or women and children spending that time in educational settings. In conflict situations, providing access to clean water minimizes exposure to possible violence and sexual violence for women and children alike. For children, it further reduces exposure to possible abduction and exploitation as soldiers by armed groups.

Water is life-giving. But it can also give new and different life: life that is safer and richer for those who have not had access.

2. *Baptism shows that that water is not ours but given to all, and orients us to the waters of creation, which are a gift of God.*

How does this insight and affirmation inform Christian participation in the conversations on the privatization of water?

We affirm that water is a gift from God, a gift to all. We also proclaim that the world and all creation is God's gift. Is there a difference between God's gift of water and God's gift of gold or other minerals and ores?

The life of the created order and the human creature depends on water in ways it does not depend on gold. Water is essential. Without water, life could not exist. That would seem to set it apart from other elements of creation, elements which enhance life but which are not as fundamentally necessary for life. Does that suggest that it should be viewed and treated differently?

Around the world, the answer seems to be mixed. A mixture of private, public, and public-private partnerships provide water to countries and communities around the world. Results seem mixed and other factors, such as level of corruption, play important roles in those results.

Still, we witness more and more multinational corporations taking control of public water resources and prioritizing profits for stockholders over the needs of the communities they serve. Water is traded, as are other commodities.¹ Futures can be bought and sold. Some argue such trading will help conserve water.² As governments and civil society look at how water will be provided, conversations--indeed, debate--on the privatization of water have begun in places from

¹ <http://fortune.com/2014/06/25/water-futures-markets/>

² <http://www.waterfind.com.au/>

Detroit³ to Lagos⁴ and beyond. In our baptism, we affirm water as God's gift. How we will articulate that affirmation in these debates? What difference might it make?

The baptismal affirmation of water as God's gift appears to resonate in the identification of water as a human right. The first time this right was articulated in international law came in the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC). Adopted in 1989, and ratified by all UN member states except Somalia and the United States,⁵ the CRC addresses the spectrum of human rights established in other UN Conventions and Covenants. It looks at civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights from children's point of view. The CRC sets out the specific ways the international communities should ensure these fundamental human rights for children and young people. Article 24 of the Convention states that Parties "shall pursue full implementation of this right and, in particular, shall take appropriate measures: To combat disease and malnutrition including within the framework of primary health care, through *inter alia* the application of readily available technology and through the provision of adequate nutritious foods and clean drinking water, taking into consideration the dangers and risks of environmental pollution."⁶ Thus the CRC establishes that children have the right to life through the provision of basic needs including primary health care, food, and water.

In 2002, the United Nations Committee on Economic, Cultural and Social Rights issued a General Comment on the right to water.⁷ This comment addressed Articles 11 and 12 of the

³ <http://www.commondreams.org/views/2014/09/10/detroits-new-regional-water-authority-prelude-privatization>

⁴ <http://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2015/jan/30/water-privatisation-worldwide-failure-lagos-world-bank>

⁵ https://treaties.un.org/Pages/ViewDetails.aspx?src=IND&mtdsg_no=IV-11&chapter=4&lang=en

⁶ <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

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[http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/0/a5458d1d1bbd713fc1256cc400389e94/\\$FILE/G0340229.pdf](http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/0/a5458d1d1bbd713fc1256cc400389e94/$FILE/G0340229.pdf)

International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and was signed by the United States but not ratified by some thirty UN member states, including the United States.⁸

This Covenant affirms “the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself [sic] and his [sic] family, including adequate food, clothing and housing.”⁹ The 2002 General Comment moves beyond further, stating, “Water is a limited natural resource and a public good fundamental for life and health. The human right to water is indispensable for leading a life in human dignity. It is a prerequisite for the realization of other human rights.”¹⁰ The comment also affirms that, “[t]he human right to water entitles everyone to sufficient, affordable, physically accessible, safe and acceptable water for personal and domestic uses.”¹¹

The implication of this General Comment is that member states that have ratified the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights are required to “...take the necessary steps towards the progressive achievement of the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living, including access to water and sanitation.”¹² This imposes three types of obligations on states that are party to the Covenant: obligations to respect, obligations to protect and obligations to fulfill.¹³ These are standard types of obligation with regard to human rights.

On 28 July 2010, the United Nations General Assembly adopted Resolution 64/293 that recognized the human right to water and sanitation. The Resolution stated that clean drinking water and sanitation are essential to the realization of all human rights.¹⁴ The Resolution calls states and international organizations to help make real this right through providing financial

⁸ <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/ProfessionalInterest/Pages/CESCR.aspx>

⁹ *Ibid.*

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[http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/0/a5458d1d1bbd713fc1256cc400389e94/\\$FILE/G0340229.pdf](http://www.unhchr.ch/tbs/doc.nsf/0/a5458d1d1bbd713fc1256cc400389e94/$FILE/G0340229.pdf)

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ <http://www.un.org/es/comun/docs/?symbol=A/RES/64/292&lang=E>

resources and through helping with capacity-building and technology transfer to aid countries, in particular developing countries, as they to provide safe, clean, accessible and affordable drinking water and sanitation for all.¹⁵

Of course passing resolutions and making comments is one thing; meeting the responsibilities under those resolutions and comments is another. Resolutions of the United Nations General Assembly are not binding under international law. They express the consensus of the member states and carry the moral weight of the world. But there is no mechanism to enforce them. Each state, group of states, and civil society bear the responsibility to live into the resolution.

The Convention on the Rights of the Child carries greater import. For states party to the CRC, it has the status of international law. As with any international treaty, the challenge lies in the implementation. The CRC, like all international treaties, contains provisions and mechanisms for state parties to report how they are fulfilling their responsibilities under the treaty. The CRC also creates a Committee on the Rights of the Child, for the “purpose of examining the progress made by States Parties in achieving the realization of the obligations undertaken” in the Convention.¹⁶ Again, how well this happens depends on the willingness of states to implement the CRC. Civil society can play a significant role in raising questions and pushing concerns about how well, or poorly, states are doing.

Recognizing the right to water as a human right means that states have obligations to respect, protect and fulfill this right for their citizens. How states do so is left to their discretion. When it comes to the right to water, that means states may provide water through public or private means or through public-private partnerships.

¹⁵ http://www.un.org/waterforlifedecade/human_right_to_water.shtml

¹⁶ <http://www.ohchr.org/en/professionalinterest/pages/crc.aspx>

Yet recognition of the right to water does not end the discussion of how the world uses water. The debates will continue. As followers of Jesus, we take part in such debates aware of, and learning more about, the realities of water use and abuse around the world. We consider the implications of recognizing water as a human right.

But we also bring the insights we gain from remembering our baptisms. Water is a gift of God. Water is not ours, but given to all. Those insights might not identify specific policy recommendations but they contain an affirmation by which to evaluate all such recommendations: water is God's gift for the common good of the world.

As Dr. Moore-Keish notes, our baptism in Christ draws us "into solidarity with the wounded world. We are not transported to some other world, but more profoundly into this one, with its brokenness and pain. At the same, time, baptism plunges us into deep longing for the day when the clear waters of life will run through the new Jerusalem." May such longing inspire us to see that justice is done and God's gift of water flows for all.