



Goal 6:

CLEAN WATER AND SANITATION

The great civilisations that have emerged throughout history have been based near water. Mesopotamia had the Euphrates and the Tigris; Egypt had the Nile. Water has always been vital to individuals and fundamental to well-functioning societies. We must have drinking water to live, and when the only water available is not clean, it can cause disease. This is what makes the fact that one in nine people worldwide does not have access to clean water so serious.⁸

One in three people do not have access to proper sanitation.⁹ In order for sanitary conditions to be considered good and safe, toilets must be built so that human skin does not come into contact with excrement, and people must be able to wash their hands after using the toilet. Furthermore, toilets must be screened off to ensure privacy, and it must be safe to get to the toilet. In many places, for example, women are exposed to assault and rape if they go to the toilet after dark. In poor countries, many people die because of diseases associated with poor sanitation. They die from treatable and preventable diseases.

The Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) states that we must ensure availability and sustainable management of water and sanitation for all by 2030. The good news is that there is enough water for all people. The challenge is to distribute the water and keep it clean. It is relatively easy to build safe, hygienic toilets. The challenge is to spread awareness about how this can be done. Achieving this goal is a prerequisite for achieving many of the other SDGs. Not least, it is fundamental to the dignity of individuals.

Biblical reflection

The people we meet in the Bible, lived in an environment exposed to drought. Their experiences had taught them that all forms of life depend on access to clean water. Water is a gift from above, both in a physical and a spiritual sense. The narrative about the Garden of Eden starts by describing the earth as barren and arid before God "caused it to rain upon the earth". Then a stream rose from the earth and watered the whole face of the ground. Now the condition for life was at hand, and God "formed man from the dust of the ground" so that he became "a living being" (Genesis 2:4-7). We then hear about the river that provided water to all life in the garden; it divided into four branches, as a reminder that water is to be shared and not to be restricted to one course to which only few have access.

In times of draught, the powerful know how to seize control over water resources, ignoring the poor and their needs. The Bible tells about the prophets who condemned such unjust behaviour and announced a time when everyone who thirsts, would be given free access to water (Isaiah 55:1). Clean water is God's good gift for the well-being of all; it is unjust to make it a commodity reserved for the privileged few.

Question

- How can we justify the right to clean water ethically and theologically?

Challenge

Ensuring that people have access to clean water and proper sanitation is fundamental to progress. The more a topic is discussed in the public space, the more likely it is that politicians will raise the issue in international forums. Is there anything you can do to raise awareness of SDG 6?

Prayer

*Lord Jesus Christ, you give us living water,
Give us also a thirst for justice,
And quench our thirst.
Teach us to build a world where there is dignity for everyone.*

*We commit everything and everyone, into your hands, Lord.
Amen.*