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# BLUE THEOLOGY AND WATERSHED DISCIPLESHIP IN SOUTH AFRICA

## ABSTRACT

In an era increasingly shaped by escalating water crises, Ched Myers calls the church to watershed discipleship, arguing that watershed discipleship is a faithful response to Christian mission amidst a looming environmental catastrophe. The practical application of a traditional creation care paradigm can remain abstract, a-contextual and cosmetic; insufficiently radical in its diagnosis – remaining located in the political geography of dominant cultural ideation rather than in the topography of creation. Watershed discipleship has the potential to offer a postcolonial interpretation of the great commission as the incarnational yet missional re-inhabiting of the places in which we reside. In South Africa, a region beset with severe droughts and where water demand is outstripping supply, the work of Myers is hardly known. Building on Myers, the argument and application of watershed discipleship to a South African context will be demonstrated.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Ched Myers is perhaps most well-known for *Binding the strong man – A political reading of Mark's Story of Jesus* (1988), one of the earliest commentaries to take an empirical-critical view. Jesus is presented as a liberator who questions imperial dominance; his healing stories become a paradigm for social activism (Dube 2018). Much

of Myers' subsequent teaching and activism has been linked to issues of peace and justice. In recent years, however, his thoughts on justice have taken on a blue hue.<sup>1</sup>

Throughout his life, Myers has found it difficult to see the fragile chaparral and oak savannah landscapes of southern California bulldozed and paved over (Myers 2016:9). Yet, through his years of solidarity work with indigenous communities in the mid-1980s, he was taught that those who are most deeply rooted in their sense of place are also those who fight most fiercely to preserve that same space. Myers loves to quote Baba Dioum in this regard:

We won't save places we don't love, we can't love places we don't know, and we don't know places we haven't learned (Myers & Nadeau 2016:16).

Myers had to learn an appreciation for local place, to re-inhabit space and, in particular, to know the Ventura River watershed he calls home. Writings by Wendell Berry and Gary Snyder inspired Myers to explore the ecological and social terrain of southern California in earnest and to go on a journey of, what he called, "re-place-ment" that crystallised as watershed discipleship (Myers & Nadeau 2016:8, 10). He has a sense of urgency about the task of watershed discipleship since, he argues, the ecological crisis stalking us for centuries, "is now upon us in the interlocking catastrophes of climate destruction, habitat degradation, species extinction, and resource exhaustion" (Myers 2014b:250). Watershed discipleship is a new paradigm for ecological theology and practice that Myers believes is key to addressing the crisis presently confronting human civilisation (Myers 2016:1).

South Africa is one such country in crisis. A country that has recently come through a severe drought that will be remembered as one of the worst in living memory, due to the water restrictions imposed to drastically reduce demand. In some places, such as in Cape Town in the Western Cape and Ballito in KwaZulu-Natal, it reached crisis point and gave rise to political manoeuvring about who was to blame. But the blame-game is too simplistic, in this instance. Water scarcity is an issue for which South African society needs to take responsibility, and not least, with which the church needs to engage – both theologically and practically.

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1 Myers would make a good case study in the discipline of Historical Theology. Over the course of his lifetime, his theology has been shaped by his lived experience. The historical trajectory of individual theologians is an important aspect of Historical Theology (Dreyer 2017). Yet hardly any attention tends to be paid to the social and contextual realities that shape ecclesiologies and result in thinking or practices evolving over time (Percy 2006).

The water crisis is precipitated by South African hydrology. Our average rainfall is just over half the world average, with a high degree of spatial and seasonal variance. The eastern and southern parts of the country receive considerably more rainfall than the arid to semi-arid western and central regions. Water scarcity and drought cycles are normative. South Africa is classified as a water-scarce country. This means that we should be living and developing as a society with scarcity as our normative state, not the exception to the rule. Water surplus must be perceived as an abnormal state, celebrated when it occurs, but not depended upon. Yet lifestyle choices, economic preferences and short-term political posturing give hardly any impetus to responding to this scarcity. The question of citizens managing demand and of Christians stewarding water becomes critical. How we relate to water and the place in which we live, our physical hydrological catchment is of utmost importance if we are to achieve a sustainable future for our descendants as well as the complex ecological systems that also depend on water for life.

This article profiles the lesser known work of activist theologian and missiologist, Ched Myers, who is on the forefront of pioneering the idea of “watershed discipleship”, bringing together hydrological and theological discourses in much the same way as has been done with ecological or climate change discourses previously. A case study from a recent drought in KwaZulu-Natal is used to interrogate interactions at the level of a catchment or, what Myers calls, a watershed.<sup>2</sup> Lessons will be drawn out that apply more generally to South Africa in light of the importance of watershed discipleship.

## 2. WATERSHED DISCIPLESHIP

Discussions about sustainable development and the precautionary principle from last century have come to shape theological discourses with respect to environmental stewardship, creation care, and sustainable communities, and have crossed over into environmental justice from an

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2 Disclaimer: A watershed is the ridge of land that separates waters flowing into different river catchments (or basins). In North America, this term is commonly used to describe an area of land that drains all the streams and rainfall to a common outlet, in other words, what is termed a catchment in South African hydrological science. However, given that Myers’ narrative has advanced the phrase “watershed discipleship” and has repeatedly used the term “watershed” instead of “catchment”, I will adopt Myers’ usage. This should not be a reflection of my understanding of hydrology. When discussing straight hydrology, not theology, the term “catchment” will be used.

already established advocacy of social justice. Environmental theology is now more readily recognised than many other forms of contextual theology (Conradie 2013:108). Internationally, there has been a proliferation of books, classes and conferences on eco-theology, popularised through creation care movements (Myers 2014b:252). In North America, environmental stewardship is one of the fastest growing areas of public concern (Myers 2014b:252). Earth spirituality movements have gained widespread traction among Christians (Myers & Nadeau 2016:4). Yet the practical applications of creation care can remain abstract and a-contextual, merely cosmetic, limited to a Christian green movement that engages the church in recycling, installing energy-efficient lightbulbs, and growing indigenous gardens. It is insufficiently radical in its diagnosis and not practically constructive (Myers 2016:4). There is thus a need to develop an approach rooted in space and place, to help (in the words of Dorothy Day) “build a new world in the shell of the old” and for us to start where we are as Christians (Myers 2016:7-8).

Concurrently, bioregional thought has become ever more widespread and has matured over the past half century (Myers 2014b:257). A watershed is an expression or application of bioregional thought and is integral to the discipline of hydrology. It is also a key concept in South African water law (Republic of South Africa 1998). However, there has not been a great deal of cross-over into theology, unlike notions of sustainable development and sustainable communities, ecological systems and urban ecologies, environmental management and creation care, social justice and environmental justice. Tentative streams of thought on water are emerging in what has variously been described as “hydrotheology” (Russell 2007), “aquacentric theology” (De Gruchy 2010), and “blue theology” (Ferris 2014), and collectively engaged within a South African context in this journal by Marais (2017). Yet Myers’ watershed theology is barely known.

The work of Myers on watershed discipleship has huge potential in the water-scarce environs and drought-affected society of South Africa. Myers (2014c) says of his own context that “this school of thought has been almost entirely ignored by Christian theology and ethics until very recently”. Instead, the focus has been on, what he calls, the political geography of dominant cultural ideation rather than on the topography of creation (Myers 2016:15). Consequently, urban modernity is characterised by displacement and alienation from land and place (Myers 2010). A gospel has arisen that denies rootedness and incarnation. The pathology of placelessness, as he calls this phenomenon, can only be healed by a discipline of re-placement (Myers 2014a:22). Nowhere is this re-placement

more crucial than within watersheds. All life is watershed-placed without there being any exceptions.

Myers advocates grounding theological reflection and discipleship practices in the watershed in which we reside and, within this spatial unit, engaging with issues of environmental resiliency and social justice. Conceived of this way, he argues that there is the constant reminder that we are citizens of specific places, Christians called to integrate the demands of environmental, social justice, and sustainability in that bounded space. The vocation of the church is, therefore, emboldened to help build a new world in the shell of the old (Myers 2014b:252). This is not some abstract “kingdom of God” metaphor, but concrete action linked to a specific and tangible sense of place. To do this, Myers argues that the “old” includes correcting errors in western Christendom that have underwritten histories of domination for over five hundred years. Myers (2014b:253) describes these errors as follows:

- A functional Docetism<sup>3</sup> that has numbed Christians to the escalating horrors of both social and ecological violence. If spiritual (or doctrinal) matters trump terrestrial or somatic ones, creation is pillaged accordingly, since it is assumed that salvation occurs outside or beyond it.
- An anthropological presumption that human beings rule over creation (shared with equal ferocity by religious traditionalists and secular modernists) rationalises how modern technological development has exploited and re-engineered nature to benefit human settlement alone (increasingly only an elite).
- A theology or politics of divinely ordained entitlement to land and resources – both in the colonising and extractive senses – categorically rejects any suggestion that our production and consumption should be proscribed, and relieves us of any responsibility for restoring degraded land and biotic (including human) communities.

In response to such errors, modern theology has seen the rise of environmental theological critiques. Creation care has gained wide traction among mainstream Christians (Myers 2014b:252). Yet understanding Christian mission in terms of the healing of the world by restoring the

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3 Docetism has been evident in the church from the beginning; the conclusion was a theory of the vast majority of Gnostic sects (Ferguson & Wright 2003:201). It is regarded as a tendency within theology rather than a definite theological position (McGrath 2010:46). The main leaders of the early church vehemently opposed this form of gnostic thought, because they saw in it a denial of several crucial doctrines, most importantly that of creation, incarnation, and resurrection (González 1984:60-61).

social and ecological health of watersheds is a perspective still marginal in our churches, especially in South Africa.

There is hardly any recognition that wherever we reside (city, suburb, or rural area), our lives are deeply intertwined within a bounded hydrologic system. All terrestrial life exists within a bounded space, a watershed. If docetic disembodiment has, as Myers argues, severed us from rootedness in particular places and engendered a culture of displacing mobility, creating a profound consciousness of the watersheds in which we live and practise our Christian faith will help re-establish a sense of connection, rootedness and location. This can become a specific, tangible space, in which the church is called to an incarnational following of Jesus, where the life of the local church is framed as taking place in a watershed context, hence the term “watershed discipleship”. Watershed discipleship has the potential to offer a postcolonial interpretation of the great commission as the incarnational yet missional re-inhabiting of the places in which we reside and call home (Friesen 2016:38). It challenges the oppressive legacy of colonising mission and placeless theologies that have sought to separate people’s souls from their bodies and their lives from the land (Friesen 2016:31-39).

The importance of the catchment context and the need for radical watershed discipleship are starkly illustrated during times of drought. What follows is a case study of the Mdloti catchment (watershed) and a discussion of how issues of social, environmental, and economic justice can be framed at this level and engaged through Myers’ framework of watershed discipleship. The arguments advanced equally apply to other catchments in South Africa.

### 3. A CASE STUDY OF THE MDLOTI CATCHMENT

#### 3.1 Background

In early 2014, water restrictions were implemented in many parts of the north coast of KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, affecting an area that has been characterised by rapidly expanding urban development (*North Coast Courier* 2014a). Ballito residents came under increasing pressure to curtail their water usage, because their principal source of water, the Hazelmere Dam on the Mdloti river, was for three consecutive years in constant danger of running dry. The social interactions and ramifications that arose during this period illustrate Myers’ argument for the importance of watershed discipleship.

### 3.2 Geography

The Mdloti river in KwaZulu-Natal, South Africa, has a catchment (watershed) area of 497 km<sup>2</sup> and a total river length of 74 km (De Villiers & Maharaj 1994:9). The river has been dammed: Hazelmere Dam is situated in a gorge on the Mdloti river, approximately 5 km upstream of the town of Verulam on the north coast of KwaZulu-Natal (see Figure 1). The dam is situated in the coastal zone, roughly 20 km from the river mouth. The dam draws on a catchment area of approximately 381 km<sup>2</sup> (Umgeni Water 2008). Like the Ventura River watershed (587 km<sup>2</sup>), within which Myers lives, this is not considered a very large catchment (Myers 2014b:258). South Africa's largest catchment, the Orange River catchment, for example, is roughly 973,000 km<sup>2</sup>. By contrast, the Mississippi Basin in the United States of America drains approximately 3.2 million km<sup>2</sup>.



*Figure 1. Map of Hazelmere Dam, Verulam and Ballito (adapted from Google Maps)*

In 1971, the South African Parliament approved the planning of Hazelmere Dam (Umgeni Water 2008:6). The dam was needed to provide a

reliable water supply for agricultural irrigation and industrial development, and to meet the planned demands of rapidly growing urban areas. The first phase of the dam was completed in 1976. Sedimentation has since reduced the storage capacity of the Hazelmere impoundment. With the recent drought, the second phase, the heightening of the wall, was undertaken and completed in 2017, adding to the capacity, but not ultimately negating the need for water discipleship, as will be evidenced later.

### 3.3 Socio-economic context

A previous era in South Africa sought engineered solutions, whether dams or dompasses, concrete walls or social divisions in apartheid South Africa. The post-apartheid National Water Act, No. 36 of 1998 was far-sighted when it envisaged water resource-management issues being worked out at the level of catchments, because everything, as Myers also argues, is interconnected within a catchment: erosion, land, water, people, employment, life, and hope.

At a human and socio-political level, the municipal Ward 60 overlaps with the Mdloti catchment. Only 42% of the working-age residents in this ward are employed, with many of those unemployed no longer seeking to become employed (Umgeni Water 2008:10). People have given up hope of gainful employment. They simply look to subsist. Yet the future of the luxury and/or middle-class lifestyle on the Ballito side of the highway further north is connected to the poverty in the Mdloti catchment. The health and welfare of the people upstream of Hazelmere Dam affect the health and welfare of the water resources at the disposal of the middle-class housing developments springing up on the North Coast. While towns such as Ballito sit in their own catchments, their main municipal potable water supply is derived from the Mdloti catchment. Consequently, grappling with issues at the level of a catchment forces us to recognise how different sectors of society are undeniably connected and impact on one another and how Christian discipleship needs to be lived out in a bounded reality and not simply as an individualistic, personal and private affair.

### 3.4 Water justice

During the water-scarcity crisis, the high-end users and consumers of water from Hazelmere Dam were quick to point to the waste of water in the nearby townships, for example, community standpipes that were left running or unrepaired. Reports were carried in local newspapers on the damage to a home from a pipe that had allegedly been leaking since 2013 (*North Coast Courier* 2015c). Yet the managing director of the main commercial water supplier was quick to point out that

the 40,000 people living in the townships of Shayamoya, Shaka's Head, Nkobongo and Etefe combined used less water per month than the upper income Zimbali estate that has less than 5,000 residents (*North Coast Courier* 2015b).

In 2000, I worked on an Integrated Water Resource Management Systems project modelling future water-demand scenarios for KwaZulu-Natal. We used a range of domestic consumption input variables to produce best to worst case scenarios. On the one end of the scale were consumers who have to collect water from community standpipes or handpumps several hundred metres from their homes in deeply rural areas where many homes are headed by elderly “gogos” (grandmothers) or even children. Carrying water in plastic containers is hard work and expends tremendous energy; water is thus used sparingly. For example, think of a young child weighing thirty kilograms and carrying a ten-litre water container, the equivalent of ten kilograms. We used input values of five to twenty-five litres of water per person per day. On the other end were consumers who have the luxury of on-site piped water, flushing toilets, showers, baths, washing machines, dishwashers, garden irrigation, water features, and swimming pools – for which they used significantly upwards of hundred litres per person per day. When the water restrictions first began on the North Coast in 2014, various online forums saw a rise of social media chats about average water consumption with tweeted comments such as: “We use 45kl per month. 4 ppl in house. Pool, bit of gardening”, and “My wife and I use 15 to 30kl per month”, and “Average 22kl per month. 6 people. Plenty of washing. Pool and garden.” That's a range of 100 to 500 litres per person per day as opposed to 5 to 25 litres. The point being, it requires a great deal of squandered or wasted water in the townships and rural areas such as Ward 60 to come anywhere near what middle-class society consumes through activities and lifestyles considered “normal” to them. The discrepancy between the “haves” and the “have-nots” is considerable, with economic patterns of wealth and privilege still largely determined by the ramifications of apartheid geography, town planning and policies that favoured White people over Black people. This is a problem of perspective that watershed discipleship can frame as a question of both social justice and water justice. Furthermore, central to watershed discipleship should be a commitment to restorative justice for those displaced in the past and marginalised in the present (Myers 2016:18). Significantly, this means that watershed discipleship intersects with conversations about restitution and land appropriation in South Africa.<sup>4</sup>

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4 Within the Mdloti catchment, there is a dispute between the chief of the Qadi tribe and the descendants of Indians who bought land once they had completed their

Only 15.2% of the households in the iLembe District Municipality (the larger, overarching municipal region) had piped water in their dwellings in 2001, a figure that rose to 23.7% by 2011 and to 29% in 2016 (iLembe District Municipality 2013:53). In 2001, only 21.5% of the households had flushing toilets. This service figure has remained around this mark. Consequently, there is already minimal water use by much of South Africa's rural and township populations and a high level of adaptation to make the most of this scarce resource in homes. The wealthy, high-end users need to adapt the most. De Lange (2010:62) puts it bluntly:

South Africans must be prepared to adapt to rapid changes in the environment with very little warning. The consequences of not doing so will be widespread economic hardship.

However, if people are dislocated and disconnected from their watershed and their neighbour, if human behaviour towards water is not or cannot be motivated intrinsically through an appreciation of the hydrological science or through a values system shaped by watershed discipleship, there are very few avenues left in civil society other than the extrinsic motivator of punishment.

### 3.5 Punitive measures

When Hazelmere Dam began dropping dangerously low in 2014, ever-increasing and drastic water restrictions were imposed (*North Coast Courier* 2014a). The evidence was presented in community forums and newspapers that users dependent on Hazelmere Dam as a sole water supply were in dire straits. However, stories continued to emerge about neighbours who watered their gardens under the cover of night or topped up their pools with tap water. Fines for failure to reduce water consumption were, therefore, imposed. They were based on a general 30% targeted percentage reduction across all consumers (*North Coast Courier* 2015d). Restrictions were later set at 50% reductions (*North Coast Courier* 2016). Neighbours were invited to spy on and report non-compliant neighbours. Water fines are, however, punitive and, on one level, entirely arbitrary in nature. It is a blunt tool, a cudgel, to force behavioural change; a tacit admission of defeat of the heart, a failure to love the other in a catchment and oneself. Separated from the relational dynamic of watershed

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indentures on the sugar and tea estates in the late 1890s (*Independent Online* 2017). These small-scale commercial Indian farmers have experienced increasing intimidation since 2015 and, in 2018, began having their land expropriated by locals without compensation. Farmland is being burnt and bulldozed (*Independent Online* 2018). This is both a land issue and a watershed issue.

discipleship, blanket fines have the potential to result in an unjust social action in the pursuit of environmental remediation or water savings.

If people will not do something because of an internal locus of control, an external intervention or imposition ultimately fails in its objectives. What is needed are vested stakeholders at all levels, conscious of their mutual interdependency within bounded space, to work in partnership towards the common goal of drastically reducing water usage. If they are to be used as a matter of last resort, fines cannot simply be punitive. They need to be ethical, just and transformative. Fines may provide a punitive wake-up call, but they are not the best mechanism for transforming a relationship to water nor for internalising the problem of water scarcity. Instead of a generalised fine, the link needs to become explicit between the cost of water and lifestyle choices, especially high-end lifestyle choices.

### 3.6 Sustainability

The notion of watershed discipleship in the Mdloti catchment becomes even more complex when the idea of sustainability is introduced, because it brings the matter of the natural environment into the discussion. The rate and quality of the water making its way into the Hazelmere Dam is affected by what is happening upstream in the catchment where, it was previously noted, unemployment is rife, and people have lost hope. To use the language of Myers (2016:21), after Dolman, if your watershed is your lifeboat, then for citizens of Ward 60 theirs has almost sunk. The degradation of the land reflects the degradation of its citizens. Not surprising, therefore, that the single biggest threat to the Hazelmere Dam is the erosion of soils arising from a degraded environment.<sup>5</sup> Not only does the sediment build-up by the Hazelmere impoundment reduce the capacity of the dam; the water abstracted from Hazelmere is also difficult and more expensive to treat, due to the fine clay suspended in the water (Hodgson & Simpson 2002). The high suspended solids concentrations in the water are from anthropogenic activities. Erodible sandy soils in the catchment are exacerbated by human activities, namely subsistence agriculture and sand-winning. Significant gully and sheet erosion occur in degraded grasslands in the catchment, which is, to a large extent, transported into the dam during times of heavy rainfall or inflow, for example, the 1987 floods.

The seemingly most obvious solution to the problem of decreased storage capacity has been to raise the level of the dam. The then named

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5 A decade after the first phase of Hazelmere Dam was completed, the floods of September 1987 reduced the capacity of Hazelmere Dam by 10% in a matter of days by depositing large volumes of sediment eroded from the catchment (Umgeni Water 2008:6).

Department of Water Affairs and Forestry (DWAF) and Umgeni Water investigated the feasibility of raising the Full Supply Level (FSL) in the early 2000s, as envisaged in the second phase. A recommendation was made in 2002 to raise the level of the Hazelmere Dam (Hodgson & Simpson 2002). A further five years would pass involving research and participation of stakeholders to produce a Resource Management Plan for Hazelmere Dam in 2008. After several tenders were called for, the green light was finally given for the raising of Hazelmere Dam, with construction due to begin in April 2015 (*North Coast Courier* 2015a). The near depletion of the Hazelmere water reserve during the drought of 2014 and 2015 triggered the engineering works to be finally actioned. However, the raising of the dam wall merely represents a short-term engineered solution to a social crisis and does not do justice to environmental (ecological) concerns or sustainability in its most holistic form.

The current flow regime of the Mdloti river has very little resemblance to that of a natural river, as most of it has been hijacked to make sure that water keeps running in taps for human usage. Human activities in the catchment affect the life of the Mdloti river, which, in turn, influences the estuarine and in-shore marine environments. Just as everything is linked within a catchment, it is no surprise that a threat to one ecosystem is a threat to the whole aquatic environment. The disruption to sediment balances and flow dynamics as a result of a dam, along with water abstraction from the system, has changed the patterns of sediment moving through the estuary into the sea. Downstream of Hazelmere Dam, there is evidence of significant faecal, nutrient and organic pollution (Hodgson 2003:7). Dam releases are required to dilute the poor water quality for the sake of both aquatic life and human health. A basic minimum flow is, however, also required in the river to form an ecological reserve.

The National Water Act requires that such a reserve be determined – this is a certain quantity and quality of water that must remain in the river for the sake of the integrity and health of the riverine ecosystem (Republic of South Africa 1998:xviii). A feasibility study done in 2003 on the raising of Hazelmere Dam determined that the existing dam could only supply projected demands at the required assurance level of 98% until 2008, if the Reserve was not implemented (Hansford 2003:iv). Furthermore, if the dam was raised, then the same level of assurance could only be given to 2029, as long as no releases were made for the reserve (Hansford 2003:iv). The Department of Water Affairs, therefore, agreed to suspend the implementation of the reserve on the Mdloti river and only phase it in once other water resources had been ‘developed’ in the region (Umgeni Water 2012:108). But this is merely symptomatic of what Myers alerts us to

as placelessness and disconnection, because it is development planning-speak for inter-basin transfer schemes, the exploitation of another catchment system to meet unfettered human need where the demands are greatest.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

A fundamental problem underpinning all these factors is an unavoidable hydrological constraint – that South Africa is a water-scarce country. Our climate, geography and hydrology create unfavourable odds against having an adequate and reliable water supply that can meet all the competing social, economic, and ecological demands. Adaptation is paramount.

Our praxis and theology need to be sensitive to these dynamics within our local catchment systems as well as cognisant of limitations, the reality of living in a finite world. We should encourage watershed discipleship conversations around alternatives to the trans-catchment bulk-water municipal supply option. There is something deeply wrong for the drinking water supplied by municipalities to not only be drunk and cooked with, but also flushed down a toilet, bathed or showered in, swum in, and put on plants. The recent drought forced citizens to investigate alternatives such as grey-water re-use, rainwater harvesting, recycled water, and borehole water – grappling consciously with our relationship to water and connection to catchments. But there is no utopian solution.

Grey-water mismanaged can lead to the increase of certain nutrients in the environmental system, which down the line leads to water quality problems such as eutrophication. Mismanaged rainwater harvesting can lead to contamination and is a concern in a supply system that does not easily allow for alternatives. Every roof and every rainwater tank can be a potential source of contamination and must be safeguarded against feeding back into the municipal supply. Rainwater tanks open to mosquitoes can increase the vector of a life-threatening disease in malaria areas. Re-cycled water mismanaged can also lead to contamination, only this time on a grand scale. Borehole water mismanaged can lead to boreholes drying up in an area. The rush to sink boreholes during droughts in South Africa in order for high-end users to maintain their lifestyle options still only delays the inevitable. Groundwater is a finite supply. Even more concerning is that, in some coastal regions, excessive use of groundwater results in saline-water intrusion where the hydraulic connection or balance between seawater and groundwater on the coast is disrupted.

From every angle then, Myers' call resonates strongly to find connection within our catchments, to make the links in communities in this space between social justice, environmental justice, and the mission of God. The idea of finding our place once again within a bounded space, a hydrological catchment, can be key for both Christian identity re-formation and the church's gospel witness (Myers 2014b:256). We need to consciously re-inhabit catchments as local churches and allow this landscape to intentionally re-shape our mission engagements (Myers 2016:210): "No part of the church's local life is irrelevant to Watershed Discipleship" (Myers 2016:213).

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