

## The Goodness of Creation - 6

# Protection of Water Bodies

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Water is a gift of God. Water is often seen as a symbol of life and a sacred element that sustains all living things. Water plays a vital role in sustaining ecosystems and supporting biodiversity. It is essential for the growth of plants and crops and is a critical resource for human societies and communities. Any water contamination affects women adversely and may carry an impact on generations.

When water is polluted, it can become contaminated with harmful substances such as bacteria, viruses, toxic chemicals, and heavy metals. Exposure to these contaminants can cause various health problems, including gastrointestinal illness, skin rashes, reproductive problems, neurological damage, and even cancer. In addition, polluted water can also negatively impact the environment, harming aquatic life and ecosystems. This can further impact the health and well-being of both current and future generations, as healthy ecosystems are necessary to maintain a sustainable and healthy environment.

The first recorded water pollution occurred at Minamata in Japan. In 1989, I had an opportunity to stay with Minamata victims in Japan, which touched me a lot and made me an environmentalist.

The Chisso Corporation is a Japanese chemical company responsible for releasing large amounts of industrial waste water containing mercury into Minamata Bay, Japan, from the 1930s to the 1960s. This resulted in widespread methyl mercury poisoning, known as Minamata disease, in the local population, as well as in the marine life in the bay. The methyl mercury entered the food chain as fish and shellfish in the bay accumulated the toxic substance. The first cases of Minamata disease were identified in the early 1950s when local fishermen and their families began to exhibit symptoms such as numbness, tremors, and difficulty in walking. Pregnant women who consumed contaminated seafood were particularly vulnerable to mercury poisoning, as the toxic methyl mercury could cross the placenta and accumulate in the developing

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fetus. This resulted in a range of neurological and developmental abnormalities in the baby, including cerebral palsy, blindness, deafness, and intellectual disability. Methyl mercury accumulates in the bodies of fish and other aquatic organisms as they ingest contaminated food sources.

Tomoko was a mother who gave birth to a baby with congenital Minamata disease in 1971. She was among the first mothers to speak out about the disease and its devastating effects on her child. W. Eugene Smith, an American photo journalist who was living in Japan at the time, took a famous photograph of her, holding her baby, which brought worldwide attention to the disease. Michiko Ishimure was a writer who wrote about the experiences of people affected by Minamata disease. She also gave birth to a baby with the disease in 1961. Her book, "Paradise in the Sea of Sorrow," is a powerful account of the human toll of the disaster. The book is a powerful and emotional account of the human toll of the disaster and its impact on the people who lived in the affected area. Their stories are a powerful



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reminder of the devastating impact that environmental disasters can have on human lives. Ultimately, the phrase "Paradise in the Sea of Sorrow" should serve as a reminder of the need to balance economic development with environmental protection and to ensure that the legacy of Minamata disease is never forgotten. Mitsue Sakamoto was a mother who gave birth to a baby with the disease in 1956. Her husband, a fisherman, had been affected by the disease himself, and he had passed it on to her. Mitsue's

baby died soon after birth, and she suffered from depression and guilt for many years afterwards. **Kimie Sakamoto was a mother who gave birth to a baby with the disease in 1958. She also suffered from depression and guilt, but she eventually became a vocal advocate for the rights of Minamata disease victims and their families.**

**Itaitai disease was another environmental health disaster that occurred in Japan, caused by cadmium pollution in the Jinzu River.** Cadmium is a highly toxic heavy metal that can cause severe health problems, including kidney failure, osteoporosis, and bone fractures. In the case of Itaitai disease, the cadmium pollution in the river contaminated the local rice fields and water sources, leading to high levels of cadmium in the food and water supply. One of the ways that cadmium was transferred to the next generation of Itaitai disease was through the consumption of contaminated rice by pregnant women. The developing fetus can absorb cadmium through the placenta, leading to developmental problems and

health issues in the newborn baby. Breastfeeding can expose infants to cadmium if the mother's milk is contaminated with the metal. Another way that cadmium was transferred to the next generation was through the accumulation of the metal in the bones of individuals exposed to it over a long period. Cadmium has a long half-life in the human body and can accumulate in the bones, leading to long-term health problems and the potential for the metal to be passed on to future generations through bone marrow and other tissues.

Water pollution can harm fish, shellfish, and other aquatic organisms by damaging their habitats, reducing food availability, and introducing toxic chemicals into their environment. Water pollution can cause a range of health problems. Water pollution can cause long-term damage to ecosystems, including biodiversity loss, habitat destruction, and soil erosion. Water pollution is a severe problem that requires concerted efforts to address it through better management practices, regulations, and public awareness campaigns. It is vital to ensure that industrial activities are conducted in an environmentally sustainable manner, with appropriate safeguards and regulations to prevent pollution and protect public health.

In Exodus 15:22-25, the Israelites came to Marah where the water was bitter and undrinkable. **Moses cried out to the Lord, who showed him a tree that he threw into the water, which became sweet and drinkable.** In 2 Kings 2:19-22, the people of a city complained to the prophet Elisha that their water was bad and causing miscarriages. Elisha had them bring him a new bowl with salt in it, which he threw into the water, and it was purified and made clean.

The Church has a role in supporting community-based initiatives that promote sustainable livelihoods and protect traditional cultural practices, which often depend on healthy ecosystems. The pastoral ministry of the Church includes the protection of water bodies and ensuring that the health and well-being of communities are not sacrificed for profit or economic development.



About the photograph

The photographer's name was W. Eugene Smith, an American photojournalist living in Japan. In 1972, Smith met Tomoko and her baby, who had congenital Minamata disease. He took a now-famous photograph of Tomoko holding her baby, which became a symbol of the tragedy and brought worldwide attention to the disease. The photograph, which is titled "Tomoko Uemura in Her Bath," shows Tomoko tenderly holding her severely disabled child in a small, traditional Japanese bathtub. Smith's photographs of the Minamata disease outbreak, are considered some of the most powerful and influential works of photojournalism of the 20th century. They helped to establish photography as a powerful medium for social and political activism and continue to inspire photographers and activists even today.