2.

Global Perspectives on Water and Climate Change

The contributions in this chapter deal with the need to address issues of water and climate change from multiple perspectives. Moving away from the dominant model, where we expect natural science and engineers to come up with the solutions to this supposed technical problem, the authors instead argue for bringing in new perspectives. Though someone from the religious scene might not be a usual guest at a conference on water, Patriarch Bartholomew challenges us to think about the moral and ethical dimensions of water issues in times of climate change. Since water serves as the source of all human, animal, and plant life in the world, having access to (clean) water is nothing less than a moral question. Answering moral and ethical questions requires partnership. The response from Bianca Nijhof illustrates just that. She describes how the Netherlands Water Partnership (NWP) creates a network of Dutch organisations in the water sector, bringing together different partners and stakeholders to better deal with questions around water.

Jeroen Aerts, an internationally recognised leader in the field of water and climate risk management, provides an academic perspective on the issues of water in times of climate change. While water is a source of life, it can also be a powerful force of destruction. Images allow us to see the impact of having

too much water, floods, and the disaster that follows. Examples from the Netherlands and St Maarten demonstrate how water can also be a destructive force. Together, we must find a balance, between recognising that we all need water to sustain us, while remaining aware of our vulnerability to this force of nature.

Bringing these different perspectives together might be uncomfortable, but it is only by embracing the diversity of our differences that we will be able to begin to address the enormous challenges that we face in these times of climate change.

Closing session of Amsterdam International Water Week

ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMEW

How encouraging it is to have witnessed individuals and institutions aspiring to global cooperation and integrated solutions, as well as management and security related to a paramount issue of climate change. How inspiring it is to have witnessed individuals and institutions from all fields of life – from political and civil leaders to corporate and industrial innovators, but also from municipalities and cities to universities and NGOs – addressing water as the most precious resource of our planet.

In some ways, you may be wondering why a religious leader is participating at such a seemingly technical or technological event. Why would the spiritual leader of the Orthodox Churches throughout the world – indeed, why would our friend Cardinal Turkson, representing our dear brother Pope Francis as spiritual leader of the Roman Catholic Church throughout the world – be concerned about something so material and earthly?

The truth is that there is a close interdependence between the external environment and our internal environment. So, we feel at home among you because, by advocating the primacy of spiritual values in determining ecological action, we are proposing that there cannot be two ways of looking at the world. By underlining the sacredness of water as the blood that gives life to the world, we are highlighting that water can never be the property of any individual or industry. We have learned that those most harmed by global warming are the most vulnerable and marginalised, which means that the ecological crisis is directly related to advocating the right to water and to eliminating the scarcity of water. Therefore, clean water is nothing less than a moral crisis and a moral challenge.

The language of science and the enterprise of innovation, the determination of environmentalists and the initiative of policymakers – all of this energy complements the purpose of theology to open our eyes to the divine mystery and wonder of creation. All shades of human knowledge are completed by the ways of the heart, diverting us from a culture of exploitation and consumerism, while converting us to a culture of gratitude and generosity. In short, our efforts for water management and security, for water distribution and adaptation, are ultimately a cry of the human soul that recognises that water is essentially a gift to be treasured and shared with the entire creation. Our deep-seated conviction is that water is the inviolable and non-negotiable right of every human being and every living thing.

Water cradles us from our birth, sustains us in life, and heals us in sickness. It delights us in play, enlivens our spirit, purifies our body, and refreshes our mind. We share the miracle of water with the entire community of life. Indeed, each one of us is a microcosm of the oceans that sustain life. Every person in the world is in essence a miniature ocean. This is precisely why, over two decades ago, we declared that ‘for human beings to contaminate the earth’s waters [...] is tantamount to sin’!

It is the responsibility of us all – as state and religious leaders, as communities and individuals, as corporations and industries – to provide sustainable, clean, and safe water for the future of our cities and citizens, as well as all people and our planet. Such sustainability is not just sound technology, good business, or prudent politics. Such sustainability is the only way towards peaceful coexistence and global survival.

We owe it to our world and to future generations, just as we owe it to ourselves and to those who depend on us, not only to act but to act in partnership in order to sustain the critical resource and common heritage of water.