Reflection by Hein Pieper

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The Netherlands has a long tradition of water management: some say that God did not create our country, but we did it ourselves. The history of the Dutch water authorities begins around the twelfth century. Previously, mainly abbeys and monasteries were responsible for water management. The twelfth century was a special period for our region – the Netherlands did not yet exist as a nation. It flourished as part of a wider Renaissance that continues to exert its influence today. Poverty was less prevalent at that time than in the so-called Golden Age. Latin schools provided education, abbeys and monasteries offered healthcare and good management of the first public goods. It was an era of common ground and common responsibilities. The values in force at the time were converted into a mentality that resulted in a prosperous country. The water authorities were created in this context – a combination of faith, values, knowledge, and resources.

In our highly technical world that relies on instrumental rationality, procedures, protocols, business plans, models, and algorithms are in the forefront. Despite the major developments that have been achieved, we are confronted with the negative sides of this prosperity. Climate change is one of them and increasing water problems are a major concern. Answers to these major problems are slow in coming. Goals such as the Millennium Goals or the Kyoto targets are not achieved. The solution is always sought in the future, data is pushed back, making it seem that the problems are still soluble. 2000 became 2020 and now we are talking about 2050 or 2100. For me, the problem lies in the way in which answers are sought. It is always the same kind of answer, based on instrumental rationality. Automation becomes robotics. IT becomes Big Data. Models become new models. Climate change primarily requires a conversion of the heart. We need a societal transformation. Our way of life must change fundamentally. Knowledge can only serve such a process.

In recent years, the Dutch water authorities have increasingly received requests to host foreign delegations or to assist with problems concerning water

management abroad. All of these issues have been or are affected by climate change. Hence I launched the Blue Deal in 2018, a project that will run until 2030. The Blue Deal aims to improve the water availability, water quality, and flood protection for 20 million people in 40 catchment areas all over the world by 2030. It is a project of the Dutch Water Authorities and local or regional water authorities abroad, supported by two Dutch Ministries, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Ministry of Infrastructure and Water Management.

The water authorities would like to share their knowledge, but acknowledge that it goes beyond knowledge sharing. In this regard, the symposium organised by the Vrije Universiteit 'Water in Times of Climate Change: A Values-driven Dialogue' together with the Patriarch of the Orthodox Church was a welcome addition to the work of the Blue Deal. This symposium went beyond the traditional approach to water management and climate change in an innovative way. A promising and surprising interaction was initiated between the dimensions of technical solutions community values, religion, economy, ecology, and politics, with a focus on the urban areas of Cape Town, Jakarta, and Amsterdam. This approach helps to explore new perspectives in the world of water management. We hope that this collaboration can grow into concrete long-term projects. We are currently investigating whether we can start a joint project between the cities of Amsterdam, Cape Town, and Jakarta. This could become a wonderful example. We look forward to the results, because exchanging knowledge and experience between these community-based water-related projects and the Blue Deal South Africa Partnership is mutually beneficial. Some of our projects are based on the same principles of a bottom-up approach with social and environmental community-based values. By sharing the knowledge and experiences of our community-based activities and using the 'best practices' applicable, we hope to build a new, long-lasting relationship and find answers to the major biases of our technocratic times. The Blue Deal projects are taking place all over the world and are still growing. This concrete project can be an example for many others. I sincerely hope that we can achieve the social transformation needed to combat climate change. If we stick to the prevailing technocratic approach, we will fail. Rather, a values approach is needed, in which churches and religions are indispensable. In this regard, *Laudato Si'* is an inspiring guide.