

# SILENT CRY OF WATER

Taking into consideration all spiritual, practical and social aspects of the water in the history of the humankind, we must ask ourselves: what happened in our relation to water? What makes us unable to see that the water is given to us by the Almighty God as a precious gift? A gift which is here to sustain, to purify and to enrich our life and the life of all creation. A responsible Christian approach towards water should perhaps go beyond the pure seeing and the acknowledgement that the water is precious, important and very often also wonderful in all its forms. Perhaps we should go beyond the fact that it also carries a deep meaning and that it is mentioned in the Bible also as the resource of the new life, symbol of the spiritual purification and transformation. Finally, we also find spiritual meanings which are associated with the water in Judaism and in Islam and actually in all world's and natural religions. All these old spiritual traditions were and still are, in one way or another, aware of water as a condition for life and acknowledge this fact in their particular way.

Why a responsible Christian approach should go beyond this? What more than acknowledgement, awareness, appreciation and wonder is expected from us? Is there something more to be expected? At the end, is the water issue relevant for us? How can we (if at all) respond to the water issue? It seems that it is urgent to start thinking about these questions for several serious reasons.

First of all, the quality of water is constantly decreasing by the use of artificially produced chemical fertilisers, detergents and industrial and communal wastes which get into the water cycle and often contain poisonous substances. So the water which has been meant by God as our resource of life is changing into the water bringing death. The problem is directly connected with the water treatment and water sanitation. Only a small proportion of the human population is privileged to have water sanitation and water cleaning systems at a sufficient level.

Another serious threat to the water cycle is caused by the global warming and by the fact that more and more water evaporates into the atmosphere – this further contributes to global the warming and has disastrous effects on many regions of the world. More and more often in the last decade we have witnessed terrible and long-standing droughts in some areas or disastrous floods and melting down of icebergs in the others.

To the water problems which we have to face today contribute also the urban architecture and the spreading of roads, which cover more and more ground with concrete; they are not able to keep the water in the countryside and do not allow it to soak it into the earth. This causes on one side quick evaporation after short rains and also the fact that the water has not enough natural space for staying or flowing away after heavy rains. All these lead then to floods. In our more or less urban countryside we usually miss natural wetlands and meanders on the rivers. Deforestation is another factor which contributes to the fact that water flows away and evaporates from the countryside very quickly.

All these developments and also the unsustainable agricultural production, as well as the over-utilisation of water and human caused environmental catastrophes (eg. in Romanian Baia Mare or in the recent shipwrecks of old tankers in Atlantic and in the Channel contribute to continuous:

☒ Pollution of waters in wells, streams, rivers and oceans

- ☒ Loosing of water from the countryside and decreasing level of underground water
- ☒ Total destruction of natural habitats for fish, amphibians and many other animals and plants living in water
- ☒ Lack of drinking water for people and opportunities for people depending on water (fishers, farmers)
- ☒ Increasing environmental, economic and social costs connected with drinking water distribution and delivery, water treatment and sanitation

When we take into account all causes of these very unfortunate developments affecting the water and the water cycle we must ask ourselves if we take seriously the calling of our Lord “Not to do the others what we do not want the others to do to us”. Do we realise that by our unsustainable utilisation of water we sometimes deprive others from the very access to water? Do we realise that our environmental behaviour and misbehaviour already now causes suffering and the death of hundreds of species of animals and plants? Do we clearly see that the natural element of water connects us with everybody and with everything living on this planet? Can we really think that UN and our national governments or environmental NGOs would resolve these environmental and global water problems and the problem of the access to water for us and for the future generations?

We can, of course, try to be optimistic and simply believe that things will improve and everything will be better in several years due to the global initiatives undertaken eg. at the Earth Summit in Johannesburg in 2002, but in this very special and particular area of water we are invited also to do something more. WE can and we MUST do real things if our environmental vocation is serious.

## **SOME EXAMPLES OF THE BEST PRACTICES IN ADVOCACY**

### **Problem 1:**

- ☒ Pollution of waters in wells, streams, rivers and oceans

#### **What can we do:**

We can use less aggressive chemicals and detergents in our households.

We can consciously buy those chemicals and detergents which are not poisonous and which can de-compose in the nature without disastrous effects – they are usually marked as ecological products.

We should avoid putting aggressive chemicals and drugs into the waste water systems.

We should notice and care for environmental situations around us and not be afraid to criticise our neighbours, co-citizens and the local authorities or industries when they pollute streams and rivers, destroy water based habitats, do not respect water protection zones or simply do not care about water issues.

### **Problem 2:**

- ☒ Loosing of water from the countryside and decreasing level of underground water

#### **What can we do:**

We can build our churches and other buildings in a way which allows water to soak into the earth and to stay there. Church land property could be maintained in its original state with respect for water. Wherever possible we can include in our planning green parking, green

roofs and natural gardens which do not require massive watering. By using public transport we would not create a demand for more space covered by concrete for cars.

We can voluntarily save water and reduce our consumption of it. We can install saving valves, two-position WC tanks and to include two-circuit systems in our buildings and building projects.

We should be able to campaign against decisions of local and governmental authorities and businesses when they intend to cover the landscape with concrete and to regulate rivers when it is not necessary.

### **Problem 3:**

☒ Destruction of natural habitats for fish, amphibians and many other animals and plants living in water

#### **What can we do:**

We should be aware of the fact that the water ecosystems around us are often unique and very sensitive. Because of that we should prevent the pollution of these habitats by the irresponsible behaviour of our neighbours and careless attitudes of our authorities or industry.

We should not be afraid to stand on the side of animals and plants when they are endangered for purely economic reasons.

We can initiate public campaigns for protection of endangered species and pieces of nature around us.

We can organise events concentrating on the lake/river/costal zone near to us, informing about the variety and richness of life in it and the possible environmental threats.

We can organise “cleanings” of the lake/river/costal zone in our neighbourhood as a public event.

### **Problem 4:**

Lack of drinking water for people and opportunities for people depending on water (fishers, farmers).

#### **What can we do:**

We can introduce the best water-saving practices in our parishes, church centres and ecumenical institutions and inform the public about it. By this we can set up an example for our communities. We can also support or develop campaigns informing about water issues in our area and about best possible practices related to water.

### **Problem 5:**

☒ Increasing environmental, economic and social costs connected with water distribution and delivery, water treatment and sanitation

#### **What can we do:**

We should try to develop and to support local and regional solutions for water systems into which clean drinking water would be taken with minimum treatment and by shortest possible distribution way from local resources. At the same time, the used water should be returned purified by us as users. Ideally this should apply for all sorts of Church buildings and

institutions. At the same time, all above mentioned practices related to minimising pollution, reduced consumption and necessary water protection and water savings should be implemented and promoted.

Of course, nobody and no institution can eventually do or implement all these steps. However, everybody can do at least something for water. The implementation of some steps and procedures suggested in this article would require sound technical or environmental knowledge and resources. Other practical steps require only good will and more attention towards the God's gifts, of which one is also the water which we touch.

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