

Address on the network day of the Inter-religious Environment Network
Nijkerk, Saturday March 28, 2009

Just like I said at the presentation of the "Declaration Vulnerability, Responsibility and Courage", the core business for the church(es) is to aim for *essential change* in the thinking of people. We often speak of change/conversion. This also goes for climate change. Because we are profoundly convinced *that only an essential change can bring about a structural change*.

The Protestant Church in the Netherlands is delighted about the publication of this ecumenical religious contribution. There will follow an official response of our Church as well.

The churches have been active for many years in opening the discussion on climate change. In the edition of the climate call just presented to our church leaders, are a few examples of this religious involvement. Herewith I think of the topics which the churches in worldwide alliance have been raising. In an early stage the World Council of Churches in Geneva made large contributions in this area. I am grateful to the Council of Churches and especially to the project group Church and Environment for the initiative that we now have this document available for the religious Dutch context.

But we are not done with it by far. Many of you remember the broad devotion in the churches around the theme 'righteousness, peace and wholeness of Creation'. Yet until this moment we did not achieve a completely renewed orientation on the basis of the churches. And it will have to be about the local congregations/-parishes. Still Christians often adapt the colour of the social and cultural context in which they live.

The document before us will not automatically find its way to the substructure of the church. I think that it will be necessary to put a lot of energy in translating it to people in their daily environment.

I want to dwell on a few elements of this climate call up:

I am happy with the *theological* input. Through the ages Christians have professed: 'I believe in God the Father, the Almighty, Creator of heaven and earth'. It is not unthinkingly that *creation* of heaven and earth is mentioned here. This profession wants to get shape in everyday life. Therefore it is good that for everyday life a Christian looks for leads in the Bible.

I still think it is thrilling that subsequently the Bible puts *man* so central in the midst of Creation in order to care for it. The tension between 'work and keep' of creation is – as climate change shows us – for many unbearable. If you want to do justice to what for example is in Psalm 8 the appeal is clear. It says (NKJV)

⁶ You have made him to have dominion over the works of Your hands;

You have put all *things* under his feet,

⁷ All sheep and oxen—

Even the beasts of the field,

⁸ The birds of the air,

And the fish of the sea

That pass through the paths of the seas."

Amidst all voices in society on climate change it is primarily the task of the church(es) to live in such a way from her own source that the Christians realize their calling to manage Gods creation responsibly. Modesty and dedication will have to be filled in personally as well.

If I may phrase this with the words of Young's Literal Translation of 1898: 'that denying the impiety and the worldly desires, soberly and righteously and piously we may live in the present age.'

See, that is permanently rectangular on what lives in the heart of a human being – in my heart as well.

Therefore I confirm what is said in the text about vulnerability, wisdom, guilt and renewal. I think it is a good incentive for further intensification. Therefore I would like to encourage churches, their study-departments and the theological universities of our country for continuation and in depth exploration of a good theological approach of the climate change.

Additionally I want to join in what is being said to the churches in the section 'Call up'. We are asked to give climate change an important place on the religious agenda, not just in theological studies but also in the area of work in the pastoral, diaconal, educational and liturgical domain.

I think we will get much further when is understood what the prophet Micah declared to be an essential attitude of faithful on earth: To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6: 8 - NIVUK). That will be noticed by the frogs in the ditch and the robins in the garden.

Whoever is familiar with the Protestant Church and Kerk in Actie (*Church in Action*) knows that there is already a lot being done in the area of durability.

From the many options I mention the *FairClimate* campaign which Church in Action executes in cooperation with ICCO – and of which a lot was to be seen and heard of in the stands today.

I mention the attention for being-church in a durable way which is shaped in all kinds of educational material and actions by Church in Action in cooperation with DISK and Kerk en Milieu (*Church and Environment*). I also mention the resolution of the Church Ministries of the Protestant Church in the Netherlands to join the organization for Socially Responsible Enterprising.

There is so much to do and to find in this area that I am sometimes afraid that the church members can not see the wood for the trees. Therefore I want to advocate for attention in the normal Sunday worship; *because it is still about the essential basic attitude*. Who knows what it means to live your life before Gods countenance can not just act randomly with what she or he gets in her/his hands. From that attitude as a citizen a Christian can contribute a lot to Dutch society. There are countless possibilities to engage with great involvement in this area. But in order to see that you need to help each other. And you have to explain it very well. When we as Protestant Church pointed out the option to the church members to choose *Green Choice* for green energy there was also criticism. The reproach was: do you need to get involved in that as a church? Is that your core-business? Others said: I am very much in favour of being economical with energy, but I am very annoyed by those windmills messing up the landscape. By the way, I too am of that opinion, although I hardly dare to admit that here. I think it to be a serious pollution in landscape architecture.

It seems to me that we as churches primarily have the task to talk about all the occurring changes in Creation from the heart of the Gospel. Indissoluble goes with this the appeal for a justifiable lifestyle. As far as I am concerned people are free to make the choices which seem to be the best.

Finally: I can not ignore to point to Matthew 6: 19-34 where Jesus is speaking about the gathering of treasures on earth and at the same time is pointing towards heaven. Keenly He states: 'You can not serve God and the Mammon'. You know that Mammon stands for piled up possessions. Always more! It can control life. Careful! In this time of credit-crisis we should not just point at bankers with their miserable bonus-system. It is very close to home as well. Ask around in your own circle if you can borrow someone's car for a day. Try that with 20 of your contacts. Only than you discover how stuck possession is. You will notice how difficult it is for people to respond willingly and hand over their car to you.

Therefore I – personally – want to say that there might be a task for the church(es) here. I suggest the churches to test if the attitude I come across in the book Acts could be applied to our concrete situation (Acts 2).

You remember that Acts 2 speaks of the life of the first Christian congregations. I don't want to speak about that in a romantic way, but I want to realize what is written there: 'Now all who believed were together, and had all things in common, and sold their possessions and goods, and divided them among all, as anyone had need.' (Acts 2: 44 + 45 – NKJV)

If you would want to realize such a Bible segment in our society, would that be possible? I am thinking of a spiritual appeal to the Christian community in view of our mobility; because there is for our densely populated country a large problem in view of climate change. I am aiming at the immense number of cars we are using. Couldn't we establish an organization where we hand over many of our cars at the Christian congregation in order to continue with something I would like to call 'Church Wheels'. Yes, I call it 'Church Wheels' as a variation on 'Green Wheels'; handing over many cars and continuing together.

Why don't we have a conference with minister Eurlings that we station a number of cars – preferably electrical ones – at every local congregation/parish we can together use on call (by internet). Only in the Protestant Church there are 2000 local congregations; add the other churches to that. And there is a large network of many thousand car points in the entire country. Through the foundation of handed over cars 'Church Wheels' can make an impressive contribution to climate change. I hope this can be elaborated.

It could be of great meaning – not only in forcing back the traffic jams but also in the strain on environment because then the Dutch car park could be reduced with many thousand cars. In the light of Acts 2 the combined churches can demonstrate that the durability of God's Creation really matters.

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