



ACADEMIA ENGELBERG

Sixth Dialogue on Science – 10 to 12 October 2007
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Words of welcome Abbot Dr. Berchtold Müller

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Dear ladies and gentlemen, dear participants of Academia 2007

I am delighted to see that so many people are joining us in Engelberg and I must say: water is a fascinating issue. It is true that water is an everyday substance, but still, I can say it is fortunately available in abundance here in Engelberg and in the Alps. It is tamed, often carelessly used and sometimes wasted.

Water is a peculiar and very precious substance; you all know this from chemistry. It is the starting point for life and together with the C atom it is really decisive for life on earth.

Water is considered to be an archetype of softness, pleasure and affection; however, it is also an archetype of violence and destruction, such as what we experienced here during the floods in 2005 or as experienced at the ocean during a storm surge.

Water is a fascinating issue. The question in the title "Water – a private or public good?" already indicates that there are severe problems and difficulties when handling water, for it is only partially available, as we know. There are only a few privileged places and countries with an abundance of water.

And, we have learnt that it cannot be used in large quantities without causing ecological impact and producing negative consequences. Rivers and lakes become polluted, creeks are decimated, the Engelberger Aa dries up and irrigated land becomes salinated.

The use of water and the question of who owns the water are fascinating but also worrying issues. We know that there are ideas that strive to ensure water sources by force.

Water is vital for all of us. This is evident in the role played by water in different religions. Especially in Buddhism, but also in Christianity.

Water is a symbol of purification, renewal, and revival, unlike blood which has been considered as the origin of life, especially in the Old Testament. Unlike blood, which is very unstable and extremely transient, water is everlasting.



That means, people considered it as something that can be polluted, but also as something that renews itself, again and again. That is why Christ was baptized with water, as a sign of purification and of the new and immortal life of Christ.

As you can see, water is a fascinating and extensive topic. It has almost endless facets.

I wish you a pleasant and successful conference with many ideas to think about, discuss and investigate.

And finally, I hope that you do not enjoy only bottled water, but that you have the chance to try our excellent and outstanding Engelberg water from the tap that is fortunately abundantly available and of very good quality.