Earth Hope

A Letter

Mercy Oduyoye

Dear Maame Effua,

Here is the letter from Belem that I promised. You wanted to know why I travel so much and why to Brazil this time. As I always say, I want to join in saving the world. Here in Belem are people concerned with working to save the world for you and your grand children. We do not want to leave you and them with plastic bags and lack of ways of dealing with the toilet business. You know about planting trees from your school project. The people here are interested in ensuring that the will of God is done on earth. They are theologians like myself and they have taken the theme "Earth, Water and Theology: Another World is Possible." My role here is simply to listen to what everybody says and then at the end tell them all what I heard, and which plans I think should be followed through. There are two others with me on this assignment, as you saw on the programme for the forum.

Maame, a lot is going on, but I shall leave the video to tell you about what the Amazon River looks like. I shall leave out the rituals and the mass media and the important people we spoke to and visited. It will be too long a letter. I shall also not tell you what I liked and what I did not like. I do not know what you will make of all this, but I know your love for words and the dictionary you are building for yourself, so let me just tell you what I have here. I am sure there will be lots of interesting words, but again the letter will be too long. I shall bring you the key words when I return. You can imagine how much 600 people can say in three days especially people who are concerned with the future of the earth.

You see Maame, the people here cherish the hope to bring about "another possible world." That is a world we would not be ashamed to leave to you. So there was an old man, all grey and full of theological wisdom to share with us how he sees us working on ecology, if we want to see another possible world. He was from Latin America. There was a grandma from the USA and an uncle from Africa, and many, many others who spoke from the platform and debated and proposed issues towards this future end. Many more spoke from the floor and even more in workshops and in the corridors. It was a veritable festival of words all aimed at saving the world. All who spoke shared their wisdom on how human beings see themselves in relation to the rest of creation.

© KONINKLIJKE BRILL NV, LEIDEN, 2017 | DOI: 10.1163/9789004352650_009

Maame, many speakers pointed out that we have placed human beings in the centre of our worldview, and thinking and acting. This is called anthropocentrism. This anthropocentrism, they say, must stop if we are to see another world. Seen as a planet in space, we human beings and the earth are one, so we survive or perish together. They told us how human lifestyle is affecting the climate around us. You may not know this but in the 70 plus years that I have been on earth, the climate has changed a lot. We used to be able to tell when the two rainy seasons and two dry seasons in Ghana would take place. Today all has gone haywire, which is really disturbing. We are all puzzled, wondering "Why all these terrible floods all of a sudden?" When there is a flood, all nature mourns.

This, Maame, is why we do not only have to see all creation as one family. As human beings, we too are one. The crises we are going through, financial, challenges to healthy living, energy crises, shortage of potable water, and so on affect the whole world. Maame, you know about water shortage in Accra and load shedding, a method used by energy companies to temporarily switch off distribution of energy to certain geographical areas in order to reduce the demand (load) of energy necessary for the entire country to run. You know that this requires us to keep emergency lights and generators for electricity. Well, these things happen all over the world for different reasons and will get worse if we do not act quickly. We cannot go on, we have to change or we shall meet the same fate as the dinosaurs. We have to change our understanding of creation and our place in it. We have to try new ways of relating to creation and to one another as a human community.

Maame, we have heard again and again words like connectedness, uniqueness, and mutuality, multi-religious approach to our challenges, learning from practiced this listening with others. One way we did this was to listen closely to main speakers and then also listen closely to people who responded to those speeches. From this exchange we were reminded that experiences, visions, and practices of indigenous peoples are not for entertainment. Their analyses of situations have to be taken seriously and should help shape the world for which we yearn.

Maame, the long and short of all this is that if we want to live long, and have a healthy earth with healthy waters, we have to stop being self-centered. Life is stronger than us but life is also fragile and vulnerable in human hands. We are greedy and inconsiderate and so degrade the earth, the waters, and other human beings. If we are to leave a beautiful world for you and your grandchildren, we have to take seriously the fact that creation does not belong

to us; we are part of creation. We cannot do what we like with earth, water, and other human beings. God expects us to keep the earth in good condition. The earth takes care of us and we have to take care of the earth and of each other.

to us; we are part of creation. We cannot do what we like with earth, water, and other human beings. God expects us to keep the earth in good condition. The earth takes care of us and we have to take care of the earth and of each other. We are caretakers of creation for posterity.

Maame, we expect all—especially people of faith—to ensure that vulnerable people do not die out. Just as we say some plants and animals are endangered species, so are some human beings, either because of what they look like, where they live or some other aspect of their being or part of their identity. We heard discussions on the ecological racism that saves some and lets others die. People who have less access to modern technology are the ones suffering for our over-use and abuse of creation. Yet, they are people who have another way of living with creation that better suits our life together and may direct us to "another possible world," the world we wish to leave you and your grandchildren. As Christian theologians our hope is that the church, for example, will listen and learn from "vulnerable people." We hope they will teach us ways of renewing creation with rituals that show respect for the rest of creation.

Maame, go on the Internet and check the number of people who claim to be Christian. If all of us will make the health of the earth our care, we can leave you and your grandchildren another world. Then if all people of faith were to do the same, we shall surely reach our goal of "another possible world." God has given us a choice on how to live on earth. We have a choice to be angels or devils. If we do not choose to be angels, then earth's day is short and so is ours. If we do not choose to be angels, your grandchildren will curse us and we cannot stand that curse. We want to be remembered for good. Maame, we have learnt that the suffering of the earth is the suffering of the people. In fact, in the Bible, there is a statement to the effect that the whole creation groans while waiting for human beings to show their affinity to God.

So what is the way forward; what are we going to do in order to have the future we hope for?

Here are some of the suggestions:

We have to change our way of thinking. We have to think of our interactions in terms of the earth, not just people. We have to change destructive ways of production. That way we can make our planet more safe, more just, and more beautiful. Our scientific creations have to generate more life for all and not just for some while others die. In attempting to promote solidarity and co-operation, we should avoid competition. (I know you are very competitive so what I have to say to you personally is that, when we compete it should be in

order to bring about the best for all; not to engage in a game of conquering others, thinking that we alone are entitled to live, or to claim the privilege of doing so without a care for others.) But I promised not to comment so let me go to the next point.

Maame, we have said so many beautiful words here. We want to celebrate life, the life of the whole universe. If we create and live by life-sustaining principles, the crises we now face will not end in tragedy. We shall jump out of it by caring and so enter the celebrative mode. We have said that all living beings have the same basis for life. We have said that life is one community linked together like a net. We want to live this reality. When we defend humanity we should do it as people who have to defend all creation. Maame, there is so much we want to do, so that we can look at the result and say, "It is good," as God did at the end of each of the six days of creation in Genesis 1. We know we are not to spoil the earth. Yet look at the mountains of waste around us, the human and nuclear waste we have yet to manage so they do not bring us death. We are going to work on them. Simple things like not throwing plastic bags around have yet to become our way of life. We are all responsible.

You and your younger sisters, too, have to learn this and practice and turn things around so they become good. We have the opportunity to live for the good of all living beings every day of our lives. Yes, we have time to save the earth, that is, if everyone becomes involved in the task. You, too, have to use water responsibly and have Mum and Dad put rain gutters on the eaves to harvest rainwater for the garden. We have to learn to recycle everything, including water. We all have to learn to live simply for we live before God, a God whose servants are given the duty of caring for what God created and declared Good. Find what has to be turned to good and work at it. Join all who want to do the same and together, we shall have another world.

You know, Maame, sometimes we meet people who think they are better human beings than others and they do things to hurt the feelings of the people they look down upon. Well, those of us at the theological forum say this must stop. In any case, if anyone tries to do that to you, refuse to accept it and say, "I am good and beautiful and can produce what is good and beautiful. God made me so and that is who I am." Of course this means that you, too, will not be mean to others.

Here in Belem, we have promised to join all those who have been excluded. The world is large. Japanese have their stories, Africans taken to the Americas and the Caribbean have their stories. We must learn the stories and the wisdom of all peoples with whom we share this one house we call earth. You are reading "The Audacity of Hope." Well, Obama was mentioned many times. The lesson we learnt is that one person can inspire communities to act together. All over

body, including children, can do something. I know you already are, but there is no end to services that children can render as my generation struggles against leaving you an ugly world.

But Maame, there is much that I cannot write now. Some of what has happened in this liberation theology forum, and what will happen next week in the Social Forum in which some 80,000 people will participate, will appear in books that you can read. I also know that even before the books come out you can go on the Internet to find out more. There is a lot that I do not have the right words to talk about to you but I have given you some of the ideas above.

The spirit of God the Creator has been with us and we are all fired up like the disciples at Pentecost. We shall go out to tell others that another world is possible. I hope you will also tell all your playmates, classmates, and schoolmates that a possible world of beauty is in sight.

Blessings,
Grandma Mercy