

## **What is ‘Religion, Science and the Environment’?**

The fifth Symposium ‘Religion, Science and the Environment’ will take place on a ship circumnavigating the Baltic with visits to some key ports. It starts in Gdynia on the 31st of May and will call at Kaliningrad, Tallinn, St Petersburg, Helsinki before ending up in Stockholm on the 7<sup>th</sup> - 8th of June. The programme is not yet fixed in all its details, but the structure is clear. There will be lectures, plenary discussions, film showing, workshop, reflecting devotions, a closing service in Stockholm and field visits in the ports. The lecturers and invited participants are generally on high level in their different sectors. In short the aim of the symposium is to call attention to the situation in the Baltic Sea with its problems and possibilities and thus promote the dialogue between Religion and Science, which started in the previous symposia. It is also intended to generate practical initiatives that will support on-going efforts to protect the Baltic Sea and apply lessons learned from threats against the environment in other parts of the world.

It goes without saying that putting attention to the protection of the environment is not confined to a single event. The responsibility to care for God's creation remains a task for the Baltic Churches also when the symposium is over. This can very well be a matter for Theobalt as a continuation of our first step in this field through the conference in 1994. Therefore, we should reflect upon what we can do to follow up the symposium. There are of course the possibility of conferences and seminars, but this follow up may also be done in the form of a study programme. In the text below there is mentioned about the Halki institute. It may be worthwhile to investigate if something similar could be introduced in our area, naturally adapted to the Baltic context.

A historical summary of the concept is given below.

In 1994, His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew I gave his blessing to the formation of a special group on Religion, Science and the Environment. This initiative stemmed from his growing concern over the declining state of the earth's environment, particularly its marine waters and his belief that scientists and clergy must work in harmony if further degradation is to be avoided.

By using the relative strengths of religion and science, together with the willingness of clergy and scientists to work for a common goal, he hopes to achieve the following aims:

1. To raise public awareness about the plight of the world's waters
2. To get clergy and scientists in specific areas to work together to strengthen existing projects on environmental protection.
3. Where there is need, to persuade national and international bodies to support new projects financially.
4. To deepen and clarify theologies within diverse religions. To develop the scientific and sociological analysis so that both religionists and scientists can have a firm and growing basis for their co-operation, mutual support and mutual education in the environmental realm.
5. To improve dialogue about the connections between religion and science.

In order to fulfil these aims, the Ecumenical Patriarch, with the support of a number of the Religion and Science Committee and other interested parties, has undertaken two principal actions:

1. A series of sea-borne symposia

The first symposium (1995) sailed through the Aegean Sea to the Island of Patmos on the 1900<sup>th</sup> anniversary of St John's 'Book of Revelation'. Symposium II (1997), 'The Black Sea in Crisis', converted the commitment into action, with participants travelling to all six countries bordering the environmentally-threatened Black Sea to better understand local issues and to engage in a dialogue on their wider implications. Symposium III (1999) travelled down the Danube River, the source of many of the Black Sea's environmental ills, at a poignant moment in the history of the region. Last year (2002) Symposium IV took place in the Adriatic Sea, under the joint auspices of His All Holiness the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew and HE Mr. Romano Prodi, President of the European Commission. At the end of the symposium, Pope John Paul II and the Ecumenical Patriarch Bartholomew signed the 'Venice Commitment', which was a statement of the need for 'an environmental code of ethics' ahead of the World Summit on Sustainable Development.

2. The Halki Ecological Institute

In the inaugural session, clergy, theology students and environmental journalists from the Black Sea countries joined scientists and policy experts for a two-week intensive study programme. Participants engaged in environmental fieldwork, theological analysis, and discussions on the basis for environmental policy and experimentation with journalistic practice. It is

hoped that future sessions similar to that of the Institute will be held in other regions that have been visited by the Symposia.