

**Plenary 8, 7<sup>th</sup> June 2003**

**Presentation: From wonder to action and hope – a new alliance between science and religion?**

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Your All Holiness

Your Excellencies, Eminences, dear friends and fighters for the Baltic Sea!

We have had a marvellous week together! Interesting presentations. Exciting visits ashore. Good discussions. Beautiful services. And a plenty of delicious food.

I think that you, like me, have learnt a lot. Got many new friends. Being passionated about saving the environments here – for the cod, the white-tailed eagle and the people and societies and cultures around this unique brackish Sea.

Soon we'll say good-bye to each other and go home again, filled with experiences. How do we use them?

There are dozens of Baltic Sea-conferences every month the year round. Thousands of papers have been written on eutrophication, overfishing, oil spills, toxic substances. Many good visions have been worked out. And several political declarations and programmes.

So, what about this conference? Is it only one in the long row of more or less chattering meetings? Which delighted its participants but will be forgotten after a short time...

I don't think so. There is something very specific, some added values already in the fact that the Patriarch himself came sailing the long way from the Mediterranean Sea up here to us in the North giving us a platform for dialogue on his vessel. Thank you for your brilliant and anxious initiative!

So, what are those extra values? Let me focus on four points.

## 1. WONDER AND HUMILITY

Of course you know that your body – literally - is a lagoon of the Ocean, that you carry water molecules in your blood which a week ago floated in the brain of a herring here in the Baltic Sea – or in a rainforest tree in the Amazon last year? Of course you know that you fill your lungs every second with oxygen produced by green algae in the Sargasso Sea? That your heart – literally – is beating on energy produced in the Sun? That you couldn't lift a finger, take a step or make a single theological or other kind of reflection without the bacterias in the black universe of soil just under your shoes; those, the smallest, the hidden – 5 billions in a handful of soil - which day and night produce the base for our food? They don't need us for their lives, not at all – but without several of them and other organism we had no chance of life, not a second.

And of course we all understand that our bodies do not begin with skin - but inside green tissues from where all our food originally come; a single cm<sup>2</sup> of green leaf contains about 40 million chloroplasts, making sugar out of water, carbon dioxide and sunshine.

Well, do we really understand and reflects on these remarkable contexts?

It is science. But also like beautiful poetry – and theology. Together these three different languages could open our eyes for the divine Mystery of life, filling our minds with wonder, fascination and wider perspectives. Which in turn could lead us into humbleness, sacred reverence and a strong will to take care of creation. Not basically because we are frightened by all threats - but out of pure, joyful love! Like the Book of Psalms describe it.

Dear friends, there is an acute need for such a “wonder-revolution” in our hectic, economic culture. A lot of people today live far away from nature – smells, birdsong, silence, starry skies - not understanding their deep old roots in the natural ecocycle systems. Many of them are decisionmakers, in politics and economy, belonging to the dominant middle-class putting the standard of values in our societies.

Science, art and theology – in good synergy – should promote a renewed culture of wondering. Giving inspiration to our struggle for the environment. Promoting a deeper existential base for our lives. Turning us from the ideology of consumerism to contentedness, being more satisfied with what we have, as a holy gift.

Such a new attitude and reformed lifestyle will strengthen the health not only of the planet Earth, for example the Baltic Sea – but also our own somatic and mental ecosystems. Well-being has today often become bad-being; people give themselves too little time to rest, to love, only to “live” without being profitable and productive; and so many of us will be exhausted or even burned out. Thus: Inner and outer environment are interdependent. The more harmonic we are, the more energy we are able to deliver in saving the external ecosystems – and vice versa.

Your All Holiness, these perspectives might perhaps be still more dialogued during Your next expeditions!

## 2. PROPHETIC CRITICISM

Scientists and churches or religious groups and individuals, together with the green movements, should be the foremost to give voice to the voiceless, to the weakest: it may be poor and oppressed people but also threatened birds, poisoned fishes, plundered forests, damaged ecocycle systems. And not to forget: Those who are unborn; those 85 million yearly newcomers to planet Earth

Why the foremost? Both science and church have high credibility among the public, because they are supposed to manage a solid integrity versus policymakers and businessmen; this is perhaps not always so, but it should be. Together they combine brain and heart in the search for truth, love and care. The Church specifically has to be an Isaiah in our time, frank, not political correct and but empathic.

Personally I'd like to see this new unexpected alliance grow up the next years here in the Baltic region. Delivering brave, impatient statements when needed, including demands on the governments and the market to hurry up with measures concerning oil transports, money for green

investments in the countries of economic transition etc. But also giving support and encouragement when good decisions and actions have been made.

One task for the alliance scientists-churches is also to communicate the vision of The Good Life, in an attractive understandable language to “common citizens” in the region. How we in fact could build and rebuild our societies, step by step to a much more equit, sustainable welfare – and in the same time improve the quality of sea, soil, air and biodiversity.

### 3. TRUST ON “COMMON PEOPLE”

Without a strengthened public awareness and many more people being engaged it will however be very hard to speed up the turning into a more sustainable life and society.

A lot of good initiatives are going on in the Baltic region as we have seen during the week. Twin city projects, Agenda 21 etc etc.

The churches in our countries often come very close to people in daily life. Do you remember the ecumenical church initiative of Theobalt, described in the beginning of the week by my colleague Ragnar Svenserud? There is now lively discussions to go further on with this, perhaps building a network of priests and laymen from congregations from the different countries. Scientists should be engaged in this meetings, transforming the often alienating scientific analysis into understanding and actions. A synergy between facts, fascination and practice! Bringing “upper” perspectives to a democratic, local reality. That’s a crucial point to be successful with all these trings, to trust common men, women and – most important – young people use their their contributions and talents.

### 4. GIVE HOPE

Nearly everybody has heard about the acid rains, making damage in lakes and forestry soil; fortunately it has decreased during the 90’s, partly due to progressive political measures.

But there is also a mental acidification in our societies – not of soil and water but of humans minds, our inner cordial biotopes, so to call them. A mental acid rain leading to pessimism, passivity, perhaps even contempt for democracy. I’m not talking about the pessimistic views which could hit us, based on real analysis of difficult problems. They are of course legitimate. What I now think of emanates from lack of knowledge, superficial media reportings etc.

How do you “buffer” against that kind of low mental pH-values, giving hope instead of frustration? A basic thing is to promote knowledge, another to pull people into a meaningful task; when you become part of good changes you’ll be more optimistic than sitting by side only watching the world. Let’s call it possibilism.

Then I’m back to the point where I started: Wonder and fascination at nature itself bring to us a renewed love for life itself, a humility and reverence. And that’s one of deepest sources of inspiration, initiatives and hope.

Science, art and theology – in exciting synergy - could give us that as a shimmering gift. Your all Holiness, dear sisters and brothers, thank you very much for this wonderful week together!

STEFAN EDMAN