The Holy See

MESSAGE OF JOHN PAUL II
TO THE ECUMENICAL PATRIARCH BARTHOLOMAIOS I

To His Holiness Bartholomaios I
Archbishop of Constantinople
Ecumenical Patriarch

It gives me great pleasure to greet you and all those taking part in the Fifth Symposium of the Religion, Science and the Environment project which this year devotes its attention to the subject: «The Baltic Sea: a Common Heritage, a Shared Responsibility». As the convention opens, it is a particular joy for me to know that you have gathered in my homeland of Poland, in the city of Gdansk. Through the presence of Cardinal Walter Kasper, President of the Pontifical Council for Promoting Christian Unity, I wish to renew my solidarity with the objectives of the project and to assure you of my fervent support for the success of your meeting.

On a number of occasions I have commented on the growing awareness among individuals, and indeed the entire international community, of the need to respect the environment and the natural resources which God has given humanity. Your current symposium attests to the desire to transform that growing awareness into policies and acts of authentic stewardship. I shall follow with interest your endeavours to realize the aims outlined in our Common Declaration of last year.

It is imperative however that the true nature of the ecological crisis be understood. The relationship between individuals or communities and the environment can never be detached from their relationship with God. When man «turns his back on the Creator's plan, he provokes a disorder which has inevitable repercussions on the rest of the created order» (*Message for the 1990 World Day of Peace*, 5). Ecological irresponsibility is at heart a moral problem - founded upon an anthropological error - which arises when man forgets that his ability to transform the world must always respect God's design of creation (cf. *Centesimus Annus*, 37).

Precisely because of the essentially moral nature of the problems which the Symposium is addressing, it is proper that religious, civic and political leaders, alongside expert representatives of the scientific community, confront the environmental challenges facing the Baltic region. That

the Symposium is taking place aboard a boat which will sail to many of the port towns on the Baltic Sea is itself a powerful reminder that the effects of ecological irresponsibility often transcend the borders of individual nations. Similarly, solutions to this problem will necessarily involve acts of solidarity which transcend political divisions or unnecessarily narrow industrial self-interests.

Your Holiness, in the Common Declaration on Environmental Ethics which we signed on 10 June last year regarding the safekeeping of creation, we outlined a specifically Christian interpretation of the difficulties which the ecological crisis presents. Christians must always be ready to assume in unison their responsibility within the divine design for creation, a responsibility which leads to a vast field of ecumenical and interreligious cooperation. As we stated, a solution to ecological challenges demands more than just economic and technological proposals. It requires an inner change of heart which leads to the rejection of unsustainable patterns of consumption and production. It demands an ethical behaviour which respects the principles of universal solidarity, social justice and responsibility. As you yourself stated at the closing of the Fourth International Environmental Symposium in Venice, this calls for genuine sacrifice: «when we sacrifice our life and share our wealth, we gain life in abundance and enrich the entire world».

Your Holiness, I wish to express my encouragement for your commitment to lead the symposium of the Religion, Science and the Environment project. I pray that Almighty God will abundantly bless this initiative. May he accompany you and your collaborators and guide you in the ways of justice, so that all creation may give praise to God (cf. *Ps* 148).

From the Vatican, 27 May 2003

IOANNES PAULUS II