

Symposium Arctic: The Mirror of Life

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Symposium Closing Address

Narsarsuaq, Greenland
September 12, 2007

By the grace of God we have concluded our symposium, and we are now close to the end of our wonderful Greenland journey. With the permission of our beloved Greenland hosts, whose leave should be asked before every public statement in this part of the world, let us offer some reflections on the blessings we have enjoyed and the challenges we now face. As each of us parts company with old and new friends who have accompanied us on this unforgettable voyage, we are conscious that our personal journeys — as religious leaders, scholars, writers, broadcasters, parents, teachers in every sense — are recommencing. We will resume those personal journeys with vastly increased vigor and determination thanks to the blessings we have enjoyed here. These blessings include the beauty and hospitality and cultural riches of Greenland and the intellectual gifts that we have received in the course of some intensely stimulating and thought-provoking and often deeply moving discussions. To every single person who wrote and presented papers, shared new ideas or described personal experiences, we express our deep appreciation.

Many of the blessings and benefits of such a symposium are intangible, but it is also important that such an important gathering should have concrete results: on behalf of the Ecumenical Patriarchate, it is a pleasure to announce that firm plans now exist to publish the proceedings of this symposium and of the previous two symposia in Brazil and the Baltic Sea.

No earthly endeavor succeeds without the grace of God, but it is also true that no human enterprise succeeds without the contribution of many people, people whose labors or material contributions are often silent or unacknowledged, sometimes by their own humble choice. It is touching to recall that this symposium was finally made possible by some generous donors who prefer to remain anonymous. Let me assure those donors that their names are known to God. May we be worthy of your kindness.

Equally indispensable to the success of this wonderful voyage were the captain and crew of this marvelous ship, whose quiet efficiency and dedication gave us the luxury of sharing information, debating, discussing and exchanging experiences in a comfortable, safe and gloriously beautiful setting. Thanks to them, we relived the truth of the sailors' Psalm: "They that go down to the sea in ships, and do business in great waters. They have seen the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep" (Psalm 106:23-24). To the crew of this ship, from Norway, the Philippines and other countries, we express our warm thanks, and ask your forgiveness if we were troublesome guests.

Now let me mention a person, and a team, whose labors are similar to an iceberg; they are partially visible, but the invisible part is larger than the visible part. You have all observed some of the extraordinary energy, self-sacrifice, vision and iron determination which has inspired Mrs Maria Becket, who has been the organizer of this symposium, and of six other highly successful symposia in different places. The word “indefatigable” is hardly strong enough to describe the way in which Mrs Becket has labored day and night to make this symposium possible, almost continuously since our previous gathering in Brazil.

Each one of us has lively and often humorous personal memories of cooperation with Mrs Becket in different parts of the world, but let me assure you that most of the things she does are seen by very few people. She tackles crises, overcomes last-minute difficulties, and makes new friends and collaborators in every corner of the world. From the bottom of our hearts, we thank you, we salute you, we acknowledge your Herculean labors.

Mrs Becket is a unique personality, but as she would be the first to remind us, she does not work alone. She has a great gift for discovering and employing the talents of dedicated young helpers who share her vision of dialogue between science and religion, and her enthusiasm for organizing spectacular and inspiring events. These youngsters even do their best to match her physical energy, even though that is impossible. To all the members of the team who worked in Athens and elsewhere to make this symposium possible, our heartfelt gratitude.

Every important event depends on certain human relationships, based on trust, a willingness to work together and take risks for another. Here in Greenland, where life is often dangerous and survival depends on mutual trust and cooperation, that principle is deeply understood. Crucial to the success of this symposium were the relationships of trust and mutual respect that were established between Mrs. Becket and her team on one hand, and the administrators and ordinary people of Greenland on the other. To the Greenlandic friends who have been intensely involved in organizing and hosting this symposium, and in particular to chief minister Jonathon Motzfeldt, to foreign minister Aleqa Hammond, and to Aqqeluk Lynge who is deservedly regarded as the father of Greenland’s cultural revival, our profoundest thanks. You were more than hosts; you were our guides and teachers, you shared with us the beauty of your land, its opportunities, its pain and its challenges, you took us to your hearts.

If there is one single message in all the information which we have received during our symposium, it is this: “time is short.” The ice of the Arctic is shrinking at a frightening pace. That is what we are told by scientists, that is what we are told by Greenlanders who know the ice better than anybody. If all the ice in Greenland melts, the consequences both for Greenland and the world as a whole could be devastating: a Biblical catastrophe in the most literal sense. Some scientists tell us that we have ten years or less to limit the emission of greenhouse gases and hence limit the extent of global warming. So humanity does not have the luxury of quarreling over economic or racial or religious differences; it must act together, and it must act now.

As Orthodox Christians, we use the Greek word “kairos” to describe a moment in time, often a brief moment in time, which has eternal significance. When Our Lord Jesus Christ began his preaching, he declared that a decisive moment, a kairos (Mark 1:14) had arrived in the relationship between God and mankind. The Mother of God, who prays for and protects

mankind, experienced her moment of kairos when she received the angel Gabriel and replied, “May it be according to your word.” (Luke 1:38). As individuals we are often conscious of a kairos, a moment when we make a choice that will affect our whole lives.

For the human race as a whole, there is now a kairos, a decisive time in our relationship with God’s creation. We will either act in time to protect life on earth from the worst consequences of human folly, or we will fail to act.

On behalf of all of us, on behalf of our Greenlandic hosts and on behalf of all the people, from many lands and religious traditions who have taken part in this symposium, allow me to offer up a public prayer:

“May God grant us the wisdom to act in time.”