

Closing of the plenary session

SYNDESMOS Festival, Saint-Maurin, France, 30 August 2001

Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana and All Albania

In the following words, His Beatitude Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana and All Albania concludes the open plenary session in which the past, present and future perspectives of Syndesmos were discussed.

Thank you for giving me the opportunity to offer my comments. Hildo has expounded the wonderful history of Syndesmos. How good for the Church that we have this beautiful history, this adventure of Syndesmos. This history has now become a presence; it is part of our subconscious. A history is never only about the past; it creates the subconscious of the present. Let us imagine for a moment that the forest of Syndesmos caught fire suddenly and disappeared. What a great loss it would be for the Church to be without the opportunity Syndesmos provides! What a miracle to have such an organisation in existence for so many years—more than half a century—without solid financial support and without the continual presence of, let us say, strong trained staff.

So, to have what is not possible shows that someone else is behind it all. That person is Christ the Lord. It is the Holy Spirit working among us. It is not our success. Without Him we would be nothing—a big zero. And in this lies my optimism for the future: we are not united around a constitution; we are united around a Person—the one and only Person who is central to us. I think that this has been one of the written or unwritten principles of our constitution from the beginning. We are united not in our name, but around Him. Try to keep the 'unity of the spirit in syndesmos (the bond) of peace. There is one body, one Spirit, just as you are called to the one hope that belongs to your call, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of us all' (Eph.4:3-5). This is our centre, our power, our hope and our perspective. And thanks to God, we are not absorbed by ourselves or our organisation, but are united in Him because He is 'over all and through all and in all.'

Of course the Lord himself said clearly that the vineyard must sometimes be pruned in order to bear fruit. Do not be afraid even to cut some of your activities. See what are the most essential and cut the rest. Since you are in a period of difficulty, keep to the most essential.

I do not believe that the first aim of Syndesmos—to maintain the unity of the Spirit—has exactly the same value as the other aims, for example, the ecumenical movement or other efforts. I think that these are consequences of what is for me the primary thing—to be together, to be around Him, around the head of the Church who is Christ. Herein lies the essence—just as He invited the Apostles to be with Him, as we read in the Gospels. He selected some to be with Him, and afterwards he sent them out. This is the main issue, so do not put too many aims and articles in your constitution; cut something. It is a healthy process to get rid of what is not needed. No one in the Church will say No to this fellowship because this means saying No to the Orthodox Church. But there are people who will urge, 'We have difficulties with this or that opinion. We are sent by our Synod, by our archbishop. Don't ask us to decide more than we can. We are ready to be together, but don't push us to accept all the

things that you have formulated in recent years.' Try to understand and also respect those voices.

My advice to you is this: keep this focus—to be together for fellowship, to act together and to give witness together, because this is the essence of Syndesmos. I read for you in St Paul's letter to the Ephesians (4:3-5) that which comes after the word syndesmos (bond). I think it is also important to read what comes before it. 'I beg you to lead a life worthy of the calling to which you have been called, with all lowliness and meekness, with patience, forbearing one another in love' (4:1-2). You cannot be successful in Syndesmos without this effort to lead such a life. Only people who are humble, or try to be, and gentle, are made for such efforts. The arrogant and the superficial can offer nothing. Be patient. Bear one another in love. What are our differences? We were born into different cultures, with different languages, mentalities, different temptations and failures. But be together in love, accepting and bearing one another, this is after making every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace. There is a dynamism in being faithful to the first calling of the Lord, to be a person of sincere love, not criticising but seeking every occasion to cultivate this bond of peace. Only this type of person can be really creative in this adventure of Syndesmos. Forget those who come, look, scorn and leave.

Thanks to the Lord, during the past fifty years, things have gone very well for Syndesmos. It has drawn people of deep faith, and they have found in Syndesmos many possibilities for increasing their dedication to Christ. These are people who have patience, and listen to the Wisdom of Sirach saying 'the greater you are, the more be humble'. These are people who are really able to glorify God, because God is glorified only by the humble. These kinds of people are needed. However, do not say, 'we are waiting for them to arrive'. All of you here have the possibility to live in this way: to be living members of Syndesmos, to continue in a state of repentance, personal renewal, asking for the coming of the Spirit; being always responsible to your local situation, as well as to the global situation in which Syndesmos implements its activities.

Once again, thank you so much for your love and kindness. Rejoice for what you are; be thankful to God for what you have received through Syndesmos, and continue with absolute confidence in the Lord. I repeat: God is enough for us, because he is God, "for all and in all", and we can continue our efforts without fear, with hope, with joy and with full confidence.