

The Report of the Secretary General

13th General Assembly 'Baptized in Christ, You have put on Christ' Brookline, USA.
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Mr. Mark Stokoe

Introduction

At the XIIth General Assembly in 1986, Fr. Paul Tarazi warned: 'SYNDESMOS can have no raison d'être except, let alone different from, the Church itself; we would be betraying our purpose if we were ultimately assembled here to discuss SYNDESMOS matters. For the Christian there is ultimately only one matter—the Church.'

The facts are simple and clear; SYNDESMOS has never organized so many activities, in so many countries, with so many participants, to greater effect, than in the past three years. Yet, what does all this activity mean? As Fr. Tarazi continued three years ago: 'All this is a sure sign that SYNDESMOS is doing its work, but in no way, shape or form does it prove that SYNDESMOS is doing the work of Christ'.

'Doing the work of Christ' among the youth organizations, movements, and schools of the Orthodox Church has been the purpose of SYNDESMOS from the very beginning of our Fellowship. As Fr. John Meyendorff wrote to us this morning:

'Remember that SYNDESMOS is the only organization of pan-Orthodox cooperation which has succeeded in working continuously and purposefully for all these years. It obviously enjoyed divine help and blessings, which place a great responsibility upon all of us in continuing and developing youth work within the Church'.

'Continuing and developing; this has been the hallmark of our work in the past three years. It is in this perspective that I present my report on the activities of SYNDESMOS during the years 1986-89. It is for you, as delegates from our member movements, as members of the Church, to decide if SYNDESMOS has fulfilled, to the extent of its abilities, our 'great responsibility'.

The Third International Orthodox Youth Festival

The largest event organized by SYNDESMOS during this triennium was the Youth Festival. In terms of the breadth and scope of the theme-'Towards the next Council', and most importantly, the spiritual depth evident in the discussions, the Festival was a notable success for SYNDESMOS.

In preparing the Festival, the Executive Committee faced two tasks: to sustain the excitement and enthusiasm created by the 1985 Festival, and to direct that energy towards a serious contribution to the present life of the Orthodox Church beyond our movements and schools. The result was an 'Open Letter', composed of 28 questions, addressed to all hierarchs of the Orthodox Church. At present this document has been translated into at least five languages, and has been published in numerous Orthodox journals, magazines, and papers - as well as several Catholic and ecumenical

publications. At least three dioceses in as many countries have used the Spetses document as the basis for diocesan reflections on questions facing the Church today as a whole. A number of hierarchs - including at least one Patriarch - sent us replies, and several commended us for asking good, if difficult, questions.

There could be no clearer sign to the Church as a whole that the youth of the Church gathered in SYNDESMOS, have found a voice.

The XIIth General Assembly

The XIIth SYNDESMOS General Assembly was the last event of the 1983-1986 triennium, and the first of this triennium. As the largest, most diverse and productive SYNDESMOS Assembly held to date, it provided the impetus for the following three years. The XIIth Assembly chose a new theme, new officers, admitted five new member movements, revised our Constitution to more adequately reflect the life of our Fellowship, revised our name, and most importantly, mandated eighteen priority programmes for 1987, 1988, and 1989. It is my pleasure to report that twelve of these eighteen programmes were able to be fulfilled; and that in addition, two major programmes envisioned by the Assembly, but not prioritised because of a lack of resources in 1986, were able to be held, nonetheless, during the subsequent years.

Conference '87

The first of these unexpected joys was Conference '87 - the first international Orthodox youth event held in West Germany in thirty years. Organized on the theme of this triennium - 'Baptized into Christ, We have put on Christ', Conference '87 was set on fire by the eloquence and excitement of Dr. George Bebawi, who opened new understandings of the meaning of Baptism for all present. The Serbian Centre in Himmelsthor, the hospitality of His Grace, Bishop Lavrentije and his staff, provided a most pleasant milieu for all participants. In fact, it was a little too pleasant; three days after the event almost one third of the participants were still lingering on!

The IVth Consultation of Orthodox Theological Schools

A third major event organized by SYNDESMOS in this triennium was the theological school consultation. Held for the first time in Central Europe, this consultation was neither the largest, nor the most representative meeting of theological schools we have organized, but, it was, according to reports, one of the most exciting in terms of theme and presentations. All the papers from the consultation will be published shortly. Special thanks are also due to our Vice-President Yevgeny Czykwin and the Orthodox Youth Fellowship of Poland for their efforts in organizing this event.

The XIIIth General Assembly

This Assembly is the fourth major event organized by SYNDESMOS in the last three years. It is only the third SYNDESMOS event ever to be held in the USA: the second Assembly, and the first event for seven years. Your presence here is itself a very remarkable achievement for it has given, for the first time in decades, the youth organizations and schools of all the major Orthodox jurisdictions in the USA, a

common goal. Those from abroad may find this hard to believe but the meeting of the North American Region to be held this evening is the most diverse planned inter-Orthodox youth gathering to be held in this country in years. Moreover, through introductions given by SYNDESMOS, in the context of preparing for this meeting, youth directors from the three largest Orthodox groups in America met in New York last week to begin a united campus ministry to Orthodox university students at fifty universities across the United States. It has taken fifteen years to hold that meeting, and without the contacts begun through SYNDESMOS, and the goodwill generated by SYNDESMOS, it would have remained a dream. This Assembly, apart from planning new events, electing new officers, and choosing a new theme, has already proved a success, and a sign, by the simple fact of meeting here, as a pan-Orthodox gathering, in America.

We also stand to welcome two new member movements at this Assembly: one from the United States, and one from Estonia. Three years ago both movements seemed only a remote dream; truly, God is working miracles in the world today.

Moreover, at this Assembly, we have replaced the old system of commission and committee meetings, reports, and plenary discussions with a new system, working from the Spetses document. It is my hope that this new format will make this XIIIth Assembly even more exciting, challenging, and productive.

Regional Events

The XIIth General Assembly encouraged 'meaningful contacts' between member movements and schools within each region, and between our eight regions. Six of the eight regions did sponsor inter-regional events of varying sizes; and several new bilateral exchanges, most notably between member movements and schools in Eastern Europe, Central and Western Europe, Eastern Europe and North America took place; as well as a trilateral meeting between members in the Northern, Central and Eastern European regions! This kind of activity, done in addition to major SYNDESMOS international events, is a true sign of the growth of our Fellowship. Nothing will promote unity among our youth - and hence in the Church - than increasing personal contacts, within the context of the Church, among fellow believers.

Ecumenical Events

At the last General Assembly the Commission on Ecumenical Relations prefaced its recommendations stating: 'Contact and dialogue with other Christians is of great value to Orthodox, and particularly to young Orthodox. It makes them reflect deeply on their own faith in order to communicate it [...] with the effect of grounding them more firmly in the Orthodox faith'.

Such an experience was the first joint meeting of SYNDESMOS with the Orthodox-Anglican Fellowship of SS Alban and Sergius in 1987. For many it was the first real encounter with the young people, history, and faith of the other tradition; and for all, Orthodox and Anglican alike, the hospitality shown by the Bishop, parishes, and people of Chania, Crete, was a revelation of true Christian witness.

A second joint ecumenical encounter held a year later continued our relations with the Ecumenical Youth Council of Europe (EYCE). Hosted by our new member, the Orthodox theological faculty in Sofia, the meeting was the first SYNDESMOS event ever held in Bulgaria. An increasingly serious meeting, the discussions helped all to more seriously reflect on their common Christian responsibilities towards their planet, and the dangers, especially ecological, that face it.

In addition to organizing the above two seminars, representatives of SYNDESMOS attended numerous ecumenical gatherings in Europe, the Middle East, and North America. Never before has SYNDESMOS been so well represented internationally, nor by so many different people. Our thanks to all who took part in this valuable work.

The difficulties of ecumenical work, however, was a concern at the last General Assembly. In response, together with the World Student Christian Federation and the World Council of Churches Youth Sub-unit, SYNDESMOS held a special and ambitious consultation in the spring of 1988 to specifically discuss the participation of Orthodox youth in ecumenical work. Our goal was to discover ways in which this involvement, and Orthodox leadership, could be made more effective. An excellent communiqué was published which included recommendations to this Assembly.

Other Activities

In addition to these large events, SYNDESMOS undertook a whole range of activities in 1986-89 that attracted less attention, but contributed significantly to the success of our overall programme. These include: publications, the meetings of the Executive Committee, and Secretariat operations.

Publications

The exchange of information, ideas and inspiration is vital to our life as Fellowship. During the last three years SYNDESMOS News has tried, often under difficult circumstances, to be a primary means for exchange. As important, however, is the widespread and regular reporting of our events, and the reprinting of our materials, that takes place in over 35 international, regional, and local Orthodox and ecumenical publications in more than 10 languages. Such publicity (or notoriety) puts a great responsibility on SYNDESMOS to continue its creative and prophetic role within the Church.

The Executive Committee

From our first meeting in Montgeron in 1987, to our meeting yesterday, this Fellowship has been blessed by the commitment, cooperation, and dedication of the present Executive Committee. It has been an honour and a joy to work with the members of this committee. These men and women have taken an active role in guiding this Fellowship between Assemblies; in representing SYNDESMOS in conversation with hierarchs, in visiting Churches (such as our participation in the 1988 Millennium celebrations of the Russian Orthodox Church) and other Orthodox groups (such as the Pre-conciliar commission), in raising funds; and in offering their

experience and ideas for the common good. Moreover, to increase the exchange of information and participation of our movements in the life of the Executive Committee, the Secretariat has, since 1987, sent each member movement full minutes of these meetings. This Executive Committee has also taken great efforts, many times at their own cost, to schedule meetings in places where no EC had met before; in this regard the most recent EC meeting in Cairo, which strengthened our relations with all our Egyptian movements-Chalcedonian and Pre-Chalcedonian - and should be mentioned.

The General Secretariat

The growth of SYNDESMOS in the past three years is no more evidenced than in the operations of the General Secretariat. In 1986, after four years in a spacious apartment in Kuopio, the Secretariat moved to its own house in Joensuu, Finland. This arrangement, through the generous assistance of the city of Joensuu, has proved most beneficial. This triennium, we have been able to have two Assistant Secretaries, both Finnish, and for the first time, both women; Soili Oorni, and for the past year, Anu Talvivaara. Since my move to the United States in January 1988 to prepare for this Assembly, Anu has taken over the daily running of SYNDESMOS. It is no easy task to coordinate a Fellowship in 30 countries with the limited resources we possess; still less easy with a President in France, the General Secretary in America, and the office in Finland. Despite this, Anu has done an excellent job.

In part, the fruitful operation of the Secretariat has been possible through the assistance of four young people - the first participants in our new volunteer internship programme. Coming from the USA, England and the Soviet Union, they served from one to three months each in the office. One of the areas that interns were able to make a significant contribution to, was the establishment of the SYNDESMOS archives, both of documents and of photos from our meetings and events over the past 35 years, several of them also represented SYNDESMOS at youth meetings outside of Finland as well. It is my sincere hope that more of our member movements will make this programme more known so that many more Orthodox young people can take advantage of this unique opportunity.

Mention must be made of the work of our new Athens office as well. The successful 'SYNDESMOS DAY' organized at the Holy Synod in Greece in 1987 by our regional secretary Christina Totouna, and Fr. Ignatios, among others, remains a model for all regional SYNDESMOS outreach events.

There has also been sadness these past three years at the Secretariat. Among the heaviest blows suffered by our Church was the loss, last November, of one of the most outstanding figures in contemporary Orthodoxy: Archbishop Paul of Finland. At its weakest moment - in 1976 - Archbishop Paul blessed the effort to revive SYNDESMOS; in 1978 he supported the reestablishment of the Secretariat in Finland; in 1980, with SYNDESMOS in an acute financial crisis, he underwrote the Valaamo Assembly that put us back on our feet-and for the following eight years he was unflinching in his personal commitment to assisting SYNDESMOS, first in Kuopio, then in Joensuu. May his memory be eternal!

Finance

Three years ago I said: 'The ability of SYNDESMOS to programme events is directly dependant on the yearly financial support it receives.' Our situation has, in large measure, not changed over the past three years. Our finances are in two parts: cash monies and 'in-kind donations'. Of the first, we still receive one half of our monies from an annual grant of the Conference of European Churches (CEC) of USD \$13,000. One quarter is received from yearly donations from Orthodox Church sources. Special mention and thanks here must be given to the individual Finnish Orthodox parishes - especially Helsinki parish - the Church of Finland as a whole, the Ecumenical Patriarch, the Patriarch of Alexandria, and the Western European Diocese of the Patriarch of Antioch.

One quarter of our monies comes from member organizations and individual donations from generous supporters, among them our own Mr. Ephtime Ephtimios. In 1987, SYNDESMOS unexpectedly faced a severe cash-flow crisis. Thanks to the timely and generous assistance of Mr. Costas Carras, among others, the events planned for 1988 were realized.

The second half of our total financial picture comes from 'in-kind' contributions: hospitality, the donation or reduction in costs of facilities and sites for events, travel subsidies, and the like. Generous assistance in this area was given by the Church of Bulgaria, the Church of Czechoslovakia, the Metropolis of Chania, Crete, the Church of Russia, and our present hosts, Holy Cross Orthodox Theological Seminary. A special thanks, and a personal thanks, is due to the Orthodox Church in America, which has allowed me to spend a good deal of my time in working for SYNDESMOS. Without this generous and unfailing cooperation by the OCA my participation in activities of the past 15 months would have been almost impossible.

Although we did not significantly increase either the cash donations, nor the in-kind donations this past triennium, two factors did help us to expand our financial resources. First, by encouraging joint meetings - especially in the ecumenical realm - we were able to hold many more events for the same amount of money. Looking for good partners, and ensuring SYNDESMOS as a good partner, will continue to increase opportunities in the future, without necessitating increased funding. Secondly, over the past three years we established bank accounts in both Paris and Athens in addition to those in Finland. This has enabled and encouraged these two regions not only to fund much of their own activities, but to seek out new, local funding. This significantly reduced the burden on the General Secretariat.

I am very pleased to announce, for the first time since 1980, that SYNDESMOS is no longer in debt. I implore you, friends, let us not rush into debt again; rather, let us continually temper our ideas and activities on the crucible of our financial possibilities.

Reflections

It is evident that the last three years have been a period of solid, significant growth for our Fellowship. There have been some failures as well. Our Camp Agape programme, so well begun in 1982, has stalled. The Iconographers' Conference,

scheduled for August 1989, has already been cancelled for lack of timely registrations. SYNDESMOS has seemed to have dropped out of mission work altogether this triennium, although some of our individual movements have begun to assist missionary Churches in Africa and Asia. Likewise, religious education concerns have lain dormant since 1982. There is still a woeful lack of communication between the Secretariat and member movements. We have to pry news out of you. Some member movements and some regions are almost totally inactive, or so impoverished that they are unable to organize any other events.

Serious organizational questions confront us: what have we done about improving our relations and contact with youth from the pre-Chalcedonian Orthodox Churches? How can we better our general financial situation? These are both perpetual, and perpetually unanswered, questions.

Other, more difficult spiritual and moral questions also face us: are we, as members of one body, using our resources, however great or limited, in the most responsible way, or are we living for ourselves? Are our youth movements and schools actively helping our young people to understand and participate in the exciting changes underway in so many of our countries? Or, are our movements creating a generation of passive and complacent consumers?

Three years ago Metropolitan Anthony Bloom challenged us: 'We must', he said, 'be everywhere Christ would have been. Where there is darkness, we must be there. If we are His Presence, His Words, "I am the light of the World" must apply to us. We must go into darkness of the world, into the twilight of the world. Where there is suffering, we must be there - and be Christ's compassion. Where there is sin, we must be there - and be the salt of the earth that saves it from corruption. Where there is evil, we must take it into ourselves, and fight it, and overcomes it...You must understand that our place is not where it is safe, our place is where things are evil, where things need salvation'.

At SYNDESMOS, these are questions we can ask - and must continue to ask anew - of ourselves as a Fellowship, and of each of our member movements and schools.

Conclusion

For seven years, first as Assistant Secretary, and then for two terms as Secretary General, a total of six years in Finland, and one in the United States, I have been privileged to work for SYNDESMOS. It has been the most exciting period of my life; in so many ways I am sorry to see it come to an end. SYNDESMOS has never had so many opportunities before it, nor so many doors open to it, nor so many challenges ahead of it. The decisions you make in the next four days will certainly shape SYNDESMOS for the next three years. they could influence the Church for years to come. Our renewal in the past seven years - especially in the past three - is not due to one person, nor to a small group of people - but to the efforts of all the member movements of SYNDESMOS in the past seven years. It would take another seven years to thank each and every person, movement, school, and Church - Orthodox and non-Orthodox alike, for sharing with me so much joy, excitement, fellowship, knowledge, and common effort over these years. I shall never forget you,

nor cease to pray for each of you. To each and every one of you, dear friends in Christ, and especially to those of you that I have learned to call just plain friends, thank you.