

SYNDESMOS *news*

Volume XVIII-1 / Year 2005

Where, then, *is* the Church?

Editorial

Where, then, *is* the Church? This was the question – a difficult and existential one – which we were reflecting on with some friends, during a discussion about the many problems the Church faces today, all over the world. Our involvement in Syndesmos offers us the possibility to meet people from many different places and backgrounds and to hear about the situation of their local communities. From all around comes one and the same concern: the Body of Christ is ill, most members fail to be a witness to love and unity, as commanded by Jesus Christ.

Do not be scandalised by this assertion. We are not passing the responsibility on to others, of course. As any other Christian, we consider ourselves as the first of all sinners, the first to bear the responsibility for this crisis and we look at our sin.

Since its founding, Syndesmos has been addressing difficult issues. And from the start, the people active in Syndesmos have been asking themselves this question: What can we do to serve the Church in her witness of love and unity? The nature of Syndesmos activities changes throughout the years according to the needs of the Church, but the same founding question remains, the same motivation inspires us.

Sometimes, people ask who we are to address the problematic issues in the Church. Others tell us that it is beyond the call of duty of the youth in the Church to deal with burning issues (e.g. the future great pan-orthodox council, the revitalising of mission, problems of freedom in the Church, etc.), saying that such issues "belong" to the Church hierarchy. Some pastors of our Church encourage us on a regular basis, telling us that it is precisely we, the youth, who have the freedom and the enthusiasm to address difficult issues – issues which are tricky for pastoral authorities to deal with. Others however argue that only they have the mandate to deal with such things, and that it is not our business to do so.

Our theological tradition very wisely ascribes the responsibility of Church governance to pastoral authorities (clergy, clerical councils, etc.), mostly represented by local bishops. They are responsible for the



administration of the body of the Church, as well as for our personal salvation. They will have to answer to Christ for us (cf. Hebrews 13,17). They rule the Church, with Christ's authority, but they do so only when they act as bishops, only when they "recapitulate" the conscience of their local Church (as Christ "recapitulated" humankind, cf. Ephesians 1,10). Only then the local community fully becomes the Holy Church of Christ in its catholicity. It is often the case, however, that the dioceses in the Church are so big, that it is impossible for a bishop to be this incarnation of the conscience of his diocese, in communion with all the local Churches.

Asking the question "*Who are you to deal with these issues?*" is also a very convenient way of forbidding things that bother some people. In Western Europe, where Syndesmos was founded in the last century, people are used to freedom of speech, both in the society and in all Christian Churches. The revival of medieval habits in Orthodoxy is painful for active Syndesmos members who have been productive in their free ecclesial service.

One of these burning issues in the Church appears to be the long awaited great council of the Orthodox Church. Since the beginning of the 20th century, efforts have been made to prepare such a council, to deal with contemporary problems of our Church, pastoral, missionary, canonical, apologetic and – why not? – dogmatic problems. Many meetings have taken place amongst the delegates of all the canonical Churches. Some agreements were reached. But still the convocation of the council itself is pending, probably due to problems we are not aware of. And even the agreed texts are not yet implemented.

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The World Fellowship
SYNDESMOS
of Orthodox Youth

*"Endeavoring to keep the unity of the spirit
in the bond (syndesmos) of peace"*
Ephesians 4:3

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Syndesmos is the World Fellowship of Orthodox Youth. The aim of Syndesmos is to develop cooperation and communication among Orthodox Youth movements and theological schools around the world and to promote within them a deeper understanding and vision of their common faith. Founded in 1953, Syndesmos counts 121 member movements in 42 countries and organizes meetings, festivals, and exchanges. Syndesmos publishes resource materials, reports, directories, books, a newsletter and a website.

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• **Memory Eternal!**

Pope John Paul II, the head of Roman Catholic Church, passed away on April 2, 2005 after over 26 years of papal ministry. We acknowledge his outstanding contributions to the unity of Christians as well as the significant part he played in the fall of communism in Eastern Europe. May his memory be eternal. See also the text on the page 18.

Archbishop Iakovos (Coucouzis), former Archbishop of North and South America (Ecumenical Patriarchate) passed away on April 10, 2005, at the age of 93. Archbishop Iakovos was the ordinary bishop of the Archdiocese of America for 37 years. He was an international religious and ecumenical leader, who was an active promoter of Human Rights, religious freedom and Orthodox Mission. H.E. Iakovos participated in the VIII General Assembly of Syndesmos in Boston in 1971 and honored many other events of Syndesmos with his presence and blessings. We pray the Lord to grant him memory eternal.

More on the service of H.E. Iakovos <http://www.goarch.org/en/archbishop/iakovos/>

• The College of Cardinals of the Roman Catholic Church elected Cardinal Joseph Ratzinger, Dean of the College of Cardinal, as successor of Pope John Paul II on April 19, 2005. The mass for the inauguration of pontificate of Benedict XVI took place at St. Peter's Square in the Vatican on April 24. We pray the Lord to give the new Pope strength and wisdom to shepherd his flock, and to grant him many years. May he continue the work towards Christian unity in the spirit of his predecessors and of the Second council of Vatican.

• The World Council of Churches (WCC) Conference on World Mission and Evangelism in 9-16 May 2005 in Athens, Greece: it was for the first time it was held in a country where the Orthodox Church is the main denomination. Over 600 participant from more than 100 cultural backgrounds came together to pray, listen, reflect and discuss under the theme "Come Holy Spirit, Heal and Reconcile!". For further information, visit www.mission2005.org.

• Colin Williams, Anglican Archdeacon of Lancaster, England, was elected as the new General Secretary of the Conference of European Churches (CEC, www.cec-kek.org) by the Central Committee of CEC on June 6, 2005. We warmly greet the new General Secretary and hope to continue with him the good collaboration we had with his predecessor Rev. Dr. Keith Clements whom we had the joy to receive at our last General Assembly in Durres, Albania, 2003.

• The 9th General Assembly of the WCC will meet in Porto Alegre, Brazil, 14-23 February 2006, addressing the theme "God, in your grace, transform the World". For further information, visit www.wcc-assembly.info. Syndesmos will be represented by the President, Christopher D'Aloisio, hopefully together with other young adults active in Syndesmos.

Syndesmos representation

• WCC consultation "Ecumenism in the 21st Century", Geneva, Switzerland, 30 November – 3 December 2004, Christopher D'Aloisio

• WCC Orthodox Pre-Assembly meeting, Rhodes, Greece, 10 – 17 January 2005, Outi Vasko and Stephen Kinyanjui

• The World Student Christian Federation (WSCF) European Regional committee meeting, London, GB, 12 February 2005, Olga Oleinik

• Conference of the WSCF – Europe Region "Respecting Human Dignity and Integrity: Gender and Theological Perspectives on Human Rights", Vilnius, Lithuania, 18-24 April 2005, Jooa Vuorinen. See also pages 18-19.

• Conference of the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy "Ethnos, Religion - Orthodoxy and the New Developments in Europe", Athens, Greece, 17 – 19 April 2005, Christopher D'Aloisio

• CEC Central Committee meeting, Aghios Nikolaos, Grete, Greece, 3 – 10 June 2005, Spyros Tsimouris

• South Asian Christian Youth Conference, Bangalore, India, 08 – 14 June 2005, Christopher D'Aloisio

• The 12th Annual General Assembly of the Interparliamentary Assembly on Orthodoxy, Geneva, Switzerland, 23 – 26 June 2005, Cyrille Sollogoub

However, the fact that the council itself is slowly in preparation is already a clear sign of the need to re-establish a collegial system in the Orthodox Church worldwide – and a sign of the lack of conciliarity at many levels of Church life.

In this respect, we had planned a meeting in August 2005 – a festival, a feast of Syndesmos – with more than 100 participants from many countries and ecclesial backgrounds, who were to gather in Greece. This festival was to take place with the theme "Towards the Council... Urgent issues in the Church". We had various proposals for hosting this festival, but we chose what seemed then to be the best place for both practical and spiritual reasons: the local Church of Alexandroupoli, through its youth movement, had been active in Syndesmos in the past years, sending participants to events and providing help in Greece for fellow members. It was a kind of recognition from the part of Syndesmos to choose this option. Moreover, the newly elected Metropolitan of the local Church appeared a very warm and welcoming host. The event was planned and prepared for one year. Many young people had applied to participate, and great interest was shown from many regions.

The participants were numerous and apparently very interested. Unfortunately, on 8th June 2005, about two months before the event, the diocese of Alexandroupoli contacted the General Secretariat and abruptly informed us that the Metropolitan was not willing to host the event anymore, for an unknown reason. We tried to find an alternative location, within the Church of Alexandroupoli and with the help of the synodal authorities of the autocephalous Church of Greece, but no solution could be found. On the contrary, the event appeared to bother the local bishop and he brusquely told the coordinator that he does not care about Syndesmos. Therefore it was decided by the organising committee of the festival and the General Secretariat to cancel the event and postpone it for next year.

We have outlined this rather detailed description of the unfortunate episode of the festival in order to demonstrate how the theme itself of the festival is burning, how methods of past ages in society are sometimes still in use in the Church (fortunately not always). The cancellation of the Syndesmos festival is a clear testimony of the need to address the problem of conciliarity in the Church.

In the past, Syndesmos managed to address some issues nobody was dealing with. In a number of our previous events, H.B. Archbishop Anastasios of Tirana and Primate of the autocephalous Church of Albania, has explained to us how much Syndesmos was his starting point in the revival of missionary awareness in Orthodoxy. Syndesmos was also one of the most active bodies in examining the difficult question of the pastoral organisation of the Orthodox Churches situated geographically outside the borders of existing canonical Churches (we refuse the common appellation of "*diaspora*" used for these communities, in opposition to an "*egataspóra*"). In fact, all the Churches of God are seeds on the earth, are in situation of *diaspora*, but we cannot develop this aspect in this short text).

Today, Syndesmos still addresses some sensitive problems, with daring and respect. Last year, we prepared and implemented an event in a difficult place, a symbolic place in Orthodoxy, Estonia (see article on p. 6-8), a country beloved by Christ, but very stigmatised by some Church members. The event was difficult to plan due to ecclesiastical tensions, but it turned out to be a success. Nobody lost anything, everybody left the project with new and positive ideas for the future. Despite the fact that the situation in Estonia is so difficult that the two Orthodox communities do not even take part in the same eucharistic communion, the youth of both communities spontaneously agreed to

collaborate in the future. Nobody knows what will be the evolution of this event and the extent to which the youth leaders present may have to withdraw their wish for reconciliation, but what we do know is that the Holy Spirit is working and acting towards unity there too.

Raising missionary awareness has always been a matter of grave concern in Syndesmos. Following a recommendation of the last general assembly therefore, the board of administration planned to organise an event especially on mission each year until the next general assembly. Last year, we organised an event in Russia, hosted by the Theological Seminary of Belgorod (see article on p. 8-9). The theme of the event may appear surprising: mission in Eastern Europe today, that is, mission in non-Christian societies, in post-communist countries. It is a challenging theme because it puts mission back to the forefront of the concerns of the Orthodox Church. There was a second challenge in this title: a new kind of mission was to be discussed. Usually, when we say "Mission", we mean proclaiming the Gospel to those who have never heard of Christ and his Church. Since post-communist societies have a strong ecclesial tradition, doing missionary work in those societies has a different meaning. Their specificity is that their ecclesial tradition has not been totally erased but has been altered, sometimes corrupted, always influenced by totalitarian regimes. Today, Church mission in these countries has not only to proclaim who Christ is, but also who Christ is not, what the Church is, but also what she is not!

Since the fall of communism in Eastern Europe, Syndesmos has organised several events in the former Soviet Union. This has become possible thanks to the freedom the Church experiences nowadays, maybe for the very first time in history. However, for those societies where the Good News of the Gospel has been forbidden for decades, the priority should not be only to hear the Gospel but also to restore the freedom and tolerance in the Church, for our Lord Jesus has been sent on mission by the Father "to proclaim liberty to the captives (...); to proclaim the acceptable year of the Lord" (Isaiah 61,1-2). And so the apostles taught us: "So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty" (James 2,12). "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty" (2 Corinthians 3,17).

In 2005, two events are to take place in a missionary field: "Training Missions – The Challenge of Outreach on the Indian Subcontinent" in India and "Youth Leadership Training" in Kenya. Reports on these events will be published in future issues of Syndesmos News.

The end of summer will see an important event in Germany: a conference on liturgical language and translations, followed by a meeting with Church pastors. This subject – liturgical languages and translations – is one of the most difficult problems in our Church today, not only in Western Europe where the event will take place. Our tradition is known for having always been aware of the need to speak to the people and proclaim the Gospel *in their own tongue* (cf. Acts 2,8). The reality is different from the theory: in most places Orthodox people do not understand even the most basic Church texts. In our next issue of *Syndesmos News*, you will find a report on this event.

Where, then, is the Church? Fortunately, the Church is living and will never die, because she is the bride of Christ. Around each bishop, in the eucharistic communion, the Church realises herself like in a systolic movement of the heart; at the end of each liturgy, the people of God, the heart of the world, is sent in a diastolic movement to scatter the seeds of love in the world in a personal and collegial witness. One of these moments of witness of Christ is Syndesmos and Syndesmos activities. May the Lord bless us all and grant us His divine support, for the life of the world (cf. John 6,51).

Christopher D'Aloisio

"I want to change your life". Mission in relationships



Nathan Hoppe leading the workshop.

Presented by Nathan Hoppe (USA), Orthodox missionary in Albania, at Syndesmos seminar "Mission in Eastern Europe", 01 – 07 November 2004, Belgorod (Russia)

See also the article about this seminar by Cyrille Sollogoub, pages 8-9.

1 Pet 3:13 "Now who is there to harm you if you are zealous for what is right? 14 But even if you do suffer for righteousness' sake, you will be blessed. Have no fear of them, nor be troubled,

15 but in your hearts reverence Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to make a defense to any one who calls you to account for the hope that is in you, yet do it with gentleness and reverence;

16 and keep your conscience clear, so that, when you are abused, those who revile your good behavior in Christ may be put to shame.

In a three-hour seminar over three days I presented a basic structure for sharing the gospel in the context of personal relationships. I believe that one of the most effective ways for bringing people to Christ in the 21st century is through personal relationships one person sharing what he found in Christ with a friend. Unfortunately, many times we are unprepared to explain the essence of the gospel to another person. We have experience of Christ and life in his church, but when we begin to explain the gospel to another person we too often become sidetracked in explaining the details of Orthodox practice, such as rules of fasting and behavior in church without ever having explained the relationship with the holy Trinity, on which these things are based. It is my hope that through this seminar you will be inspired and equipped to share the gospel with your friends and bring them to Christ.

The power of multiplication

It may seem a small thing to bring one other person to Christ, but this is actually the most powerful tool we have for bringing the whole world to Christ. If each of us would reach just one person each year and then inspired them to reach a person each year the results would be very dramatic. If the 40 people here present would do this over the next 20 years we would reach more than 38 million. This is more than the entire population of most European countries. If we were to increase our multiplication factor and reach 2 each year, within 18 years we would reach 16 billion people more than the entire population of the earth. So you see the results of touching the person next to you can change your life and the world. As we begin I would like to invite you to consider several questions. The first two relate to those around us, whom we are trying to reach. In order to reach them with the gospel we need to turn towards them in love and truly see them as they are, before we begin to present our message to them.

What are people looking for? What are their true needs?

In order to draw someone to Christ we must first see, what he or she is looking for. They will never come to Christ, unless they see that He is the answer to one of the questions, which they have. We also must look at what their true needs are. Too often our friends are absorbed in pursuing things, which are meaningless and self-destructive. We need to help them see their true needs and how the fulfillment of these will actually bring them true happiness, whereas the things, which they are following, will bring self-destruction.

Next we must look at ourselves and ask: Why do we share with them?

This question is extremely important, because we will have great difficulty sharing the true Orthodox faith if we are not sharing it for the right reasons.

Why we share our faith?

- We share our faith because we love people.
- We share our faith because God told us to. Matt 28:19
- We share our faith because we love God.

Finally, we can turn to consider what is the essential gospel message, which we wish to share.

Before looking at this message in detail we should remember three basic facts about the gospel, which will help us to stay focused on the gospel message itself.

The gospel is simple.

Although our Orthodox theology contains great power and depth, which it will take us eternity to understand, the basic message of the gospel is simple and can be understood by everyone. It is not necessary to explain all the details of Trinitarian theology or the rules of fasting and the church calendar. These are things which will come as a new Christian grows, but they are not the basic message.

The gospel is good news.

Though the meaning of the work gospel in Greek is "good news", too often the gospel is presented as anything but good news. Fear and hatred are used to force people towards the church – this is a great distortion. We must draw people by the joyous message of peace with God and the achievement of our full human potential.

The gospel is a relationship.

The gospel is not a set of rules, which must be obeyed in order to make God happy with us. It is the message of the restoration of the relationship with the holy Trinity, who created us and loves us more than anyone in the universe. Salvation and deification comes through a living connection with the holy Trinity, which is the source of all life and existence.

The following outline of the gospel message is based on Scripture and the church fathers; I have especially drawn from the work of Saint Athanasius the Great "On the Incarnation" and "For the Life

of the World" by Father Alexander Schmemmann.

In order to understand this relationship we need to understand that:

1. God is creator.
 - a. God created everything from nothing
 - b. Man was created in the image of God
 - c. God loves man and wishes to have a relationship with him
2. Man turned his back on God.

When man turned away from God, three things happened to him:

 - a. His nature was damaged
 - b. He committed sins that brought him to death
 - c. His relationship with God was broken.
3. God has acted in history to save man.

This was a very tragic situation, in which God acted with supreme love in order to save man from these terrible consequences. He did this in order to:

- a. repair the nature
- b. suffer the punishment
- c. restore the relationship

God sent his own Son. God offers to all men the work of Jesus for their salvation. This is a free gift from God, for which we can offer nothing.

Man can do nothing to merit this gift, but God does not impose it up on him. People still have their backs turned to God and do not accept this salvation, which he offers them freely.

4. In order to become participants in God's salvation men must do three things.
 - a. Believe:

In order to come to God a person must first believe that God exists and that he has worked in history for man's salvation. This is one of the great obstacles for many in the postmodern and post Christian societies. Materialistic and positivistic understanding of science and philosophy have undermined the ability of many to believe. It is our duty to be equipped intellectually to answer honest intellectual difficulties. We cannot simply say "It is the teaching of the church". This is true and ought to be enough, but in the long run we must consider the weakness and need of men, as the fathers have considered them throughout the ages. We must answer the intellectual challenges of our day.

- b. Repent

Repentance is the moment, at which a person changes the direction of his/her life. We have been traveling away from God towards self-destruction. We now change directions, turn towards God, and come to understand that the code of behavior, which God has given us, is not to limit our pleasure but to guide us to true fulfillment.

- c. Be baptised

Baptism is the moment of incorporation into the body of Christ and the restoration of our nature. It is the beginning of the eternal journey of salvation, which is growing ever more in our participation in the divine nature.

These three things restore the broken relationship, granting forgiveness for our sins and renew our nature, which was damaged by sin. This is not the end of salvation, but its beginning. It is the restoration of the relationship in which we then continue to live and grow throughout this life and eternity.

Some practical considerations as we begin to share our faith

The first thing to realise is that there is no formula. Each person we encounter is different. He/she is a precious person created in the image of God who is very dear to God. It is our desire to renew his/her relationship with God, because we love God and God loves that person. We cannot impose our will on anyone, and we do not wish to bring him or her in to a relationship with God through false methods or insincerity. Our first and most important tool to bring others to God is to live out the relationship, which we have with God, before the people. But we also need to be ready to explain the relationship we have with God to others, so that they may come to Him.

Your presentation of the good news to each person will emphasize the aspect of the good news that is truly good for him/her.

To the person, who is lonely and feels that he or she has been abused and deceived in their relationships, you can say that God is the only one who will not disappoint them. God loves them more than they can imagine, and he wishes to have a relationship with them.

To the person, who is conscious of all that he or she has done wrong in life and feels the guilt and pain of how they have hurt others, we can say that God loves them, that Jesus suffered the punishment for their sins, and that God will forgive them.

To the person, who feels his/her inability to be a better person--one who is striving to do what he/she thinks is right, but feels unsatisfied--we can say God will renew his/her nature. He will give him/her the power, if that person trusts Him, to become what he/she is seeking to be. It is through Him that he can become truly human again.

To those, who have existential questions: Why am I here? What does it all mean? We can say: "You are here, because God made you. He has a wonderful plan for you".

Occasionally and with great sorrow we may also need to say to the person who is self-satisfied and confident in their sin, "God is a righteous judge and you will suffer the just penalty for what you do." If we say this, we must also be quick to say that God is merciful and will forgive him/her; that Christ loves him/her and suffered in his/her place if he/she will accept it.

To the person, who believes that there is one God and it does not matter what religion one follows, or who is persuaded of another religion, we can say that there is one God and He has revealed Himself in history. If we wish to know the true God and have a relationship with Him, we must pay attention to what He has revealed about Himself. In particular, we should focus on the person of Christ and the fact that he is the unique incarnation of God. This must be done in a loving way that does not attack the other person's belief, but rather draws him to Christ.

These are only a few examples. Each person is different and must be approached in love as himself/herself and not as a subject for evangelism.

On the third day of the seminar participants were divided into groups and asked to practice sharing this basic gospel message with one another. This could be an excellent exercise in your local use movement. Too often we as Orthodox Christians are not prepared to speak when we have opportunities to share about our wonderful salvation. By practicing with one another we gained a greater understanding and confidence, which helps us in our own spiritual life and also prepares us for opportunities to share with others.

REPORTS FROM SYNDESMOS EVENTS 2004

Syndesmos seminar "Educating for Europe"

In this world, not of this world: What does the European citizenship mean to us?

27 October – 02 November 2004, Pärnu, Estonia

A Syndesmos event in Estonia.

Syndesmos held an event in Tahkuranna near Pärnu in Estonia 27 October – 02 November 2004. Around 30 young people from 11 European countries gathered in the Estonian countryside on the Baltic coast, to discuss the theme "European citizenship - what does it mean to us, Christians?".

Pre-history of the event: time of doubts and questions.

Most of our readers who are aware of the situation of the Orthodox Church around the world, know that Estonia, in the last 10 years, has been a prime example of how difficult it is, for us orthodox, to achieve unity among ourselves. Two orthodox jurisdictions in Estonia have very little (if any) contact with one another. As an unofficial rule, they do not take communion from the same chalice, even though there is full communion among those two canonical jurisdictions.

This context was, of course, very significant for a Syndesmos event, especially because Syndesmos has, as a main goal, the service of unity in the Church. Indeed, it had not been easy to make a decision to go forward with the organisation of a youth event in such a situation. Syndesmos was invited to organise an event in Estonia by H.E. Metropolitan Stephanos of Tallinn and all Estonia (Autonomous Church of Estonia) in 2001. But because the situation in Estonia is a matter of high interest and tension for several hierarchs of the orthodox church, Syndesmos Board of Administration, for many years, had decided not to have an event there.

In Syndesmos XVII general assembly, (in Durres Albania 2003), a strange "compromise" was made public. For the first time in its history, Syndesmos objectively became a mirror of divisions in the orthodox Church: Estonia was divided into two "Syndesmos regions". One Estonian Syndesmos member movement became part of Eastern Europe region, while the other one remained in Northern Europe region.

(Let us only imagine the same thing happening in Western Europe or in America: as there are sometimes 10 jurisdictions present in those territories, there could be much more than two parallel Syndesmos regions in Western Europe or America (and also Asia!): what a witness of our Unity in the Church!). This is precisely what Syndesmos had managed to avoid so far, by functioning with "regions" that were defined according to territorial criteria, and not according to ecclesiastical jurisdiction criteria.

After Syndesmos recognised in its own structure the divisions among orthodox in Estonia, it could have seemed impossible to organise an event there. Many people, including members of the



During the prayer.

board of administration expressed their concern that such a thing as an Orthodox youth gathering might be harmful in Estonia. The decision making process within Syndesmos structure became even more complicated from the moment that there were not one but two Syndesmos board members officially "representing" Estonia.

Other Board members expressed the view that if Syndesmos could not organise a youth event in Estonia, then it was difficult to imagine who could, and that tensions among the orthodox in Estonia were the best reason for Syndesmos to try and organise a youth event.

Some pressure (direct or not) from outside the Board of Administration was applied to "postpone" (or cancel) the project and it was not an easy task to decide what to do in that context.

Basically, what saved the project in Estonia, and finally made it happen, was that EYF (European Youth Foundation, a non-



A group discussion.

orthodox, non christian organisation) gave a grant for the event in the frame of its "Educating for Europe" programme. This element allowed the organisers to put aside any kind of hesitation and go ahead with the project.

The other important fact was that Syndesmos had local support for the event: H.E. Metropolitan Stephanos of Tallinn and all Estonia never withdrew his support, encouraging the Fellowship of Orthodox Youth (Northern Europe Estonian member movement) to be in charge of the practical aspects of the project, and also that the H.E. Metropolitan Cornelius of Tallinn and all Estonia (Estonian Church, Moscow Patriarchate) blessed the Estonian Orthodox Youth League, the youth movement of his jurisdiction (Eastern Europe Syndesmos Member movement), to participate in the event and collaborate with Syndesmos team of organisers.

Youth encounter in Tahkuranna: an experience of unity.

The striking thing after such beginnings is that the event became a real moment of sharing in love and getting to know each other, as well as getting acquainted with each other's circumstances, always in a spirit of peace and mutual respect.

The event was blessed by the participation of both Syndesmos member movements present in Estonia, as well as by all of the three remaining member movements of Northern Europe region (all of them Finnish) which also gave the seminar the dimension of a real regional gathering.

Both local hierarchs were invited to participate in parts of the programme, and H.E. Metropolitan Stephanos spent a day with the participants, discussed with them informally and gave a talk, followed by a debate. H.E. Metropolitan Cornelius was unable to come to Tahkuranna, but he welcomed the organisers of the event in his office in Tallinn and had a long and friendly discussion with them, giving them spiritual advice and telling them about the situation in Estonia.

An important sign of unity among participants was Saint Bishopmartyr Platon (Kulbusch, 1869-1919), an Estonian-born saint of the 20th century, worshipped equally by both orthodox communities in Estonia, and whose troparion was frequently sung in Estonian as well as in Church Slavonic during the event: his birth place was visited during the excursion.

Discussing European citizenship:

Participants of the event were citizens of European countries that are old, recent or applying members of the EU, or members as well as non-members of the Council of Europe.

The perception of Europe and what it means to be European, the understanding of what it is to be a European citizen were debated several times. Some participants shared their fears in front of what they would see as a western and secularised Europe, foreign to any kind of Christian concern. Others (e.g. Vital Rymasheuski, resource person from Belarus) explained why the orthodox faithful



Group photo of participants with H.E. Stephanos of Tallinn and all Estonia.

should be encouraged to take an active part in any political or social initiative in order to share responsibilities for these initiatives and structures rather than merely tolerate them or criticize them while remaining passive.

In his presentation on the topic of Europe, Jyrki Härkönen (Finland) explained his view that the separation, often made by the orthodox, between a western democratic secularized Europe and an eastern "orthodox" Europe is inherited from the totalitarian past of post-communist countries and has no spiritual ground. According to him, becoming European citizens should be beneficial to Orthodox Christians as well as for the Orthodox Church: it will introduce conciliarity and transparency in the governing of the Church; it will allow a better participation of Orthodox people both in the life of their church and in the life of their societies.

H.E. Metropolitan Stephanos in his input had also underlined the importance, for Orthodox Christians to participate in the process of building Europe. This process can help them to overcome their national prejudice that has remained intact in post-communist countries because they have been cut from post World War Two democratic societies. If the orthodox people manage to put their eucharistic life above their national values, then the church will become a local eucharistic community as it should be, instead of being a local national and cultural community, as happens too often.

Mart Laar, former Prime-Minister of Estonia welcomed the group in the Estonian parliament and addressed the participants saying that Europe, for him, is a place where one can find values that can replace those values that were those of totalitarian societies. He admitted that the European building process has not always headed in a direction that seems satisfactory for Christians, but he sees it as a good reason for Christians to participate even more in the process, so that their voice is heard and taken into account.

Experiencing the atmosphere of a Syndesmos event:

As in any other Syndesmos event, the programme of the seminar in Tahkuranna was planned so that every moment could be a meaningful experience of fellowship. Apart from "reflection



Fun at the sea.

activities", all other aspects of the programme such as meals, services, entertainment and the excursion aimed at strengthening bonds among people, giving them opportunities for discussion (interesting discussions took place in the women's sauna for instance!).

Services were, as usual sung and celebrated in many languages. All were encouraged to actively participate in the celebration (by reading, singing, preaching, hearing all prayers aloud...), giving the participants an insight in some features of liturgical eucharistic renewal of the 20th century that was considered so important by the founders of Syndesmos.

Also as in all Syndesmos events, there were moments for entertainment. In the cultural evening for instance, a special effort was made not to divide people up into national groups, but to propose common contributions that enhance common aspects of cultures, and a humouristic and respectful approach on cultural differences, including differences in church habits and traditions.

When the weather permitted, the group took advantage of breathtaking Estonian landscape, and went for walks by the sea.

A whole days excursion allowed participants to have a better insight of the Pärnu region, and its inhabitants (including orthodox communities of both jurisdictions).

What next? - Only God knows!

No one can tell whether in the long term the event was a success or not.

Of course, the mere fact that it happened, and happened in Estonia, and with the blessing of both local hierarchs is, in itself, a joy and maybe even an achievement.

The contributions concerning Europe were relevant to the subject, and most of them, each in its own particular way, were leading to the same idea: the importance for Christians using their freedom and taking responsibilities (orthodox or of other denominations) both in their societies and in their church.

One important outcome of the event was that a decision was made to meet again soon in Helsinki for a regional event. This event took

place and a significant number of participants of the event in Estonia met again in Helsinki in January 2005 (see article on page 12).

More important still are probably outcomes that are unknown and unpredictable and that very probably happen after any Syndesmos event. By creating the possibility of personal relationships among people that otherwise would have not had the opportunity to meet, Syndesmos events give people the possibility to love each other instead of fearing each other, because it is much easier to love a person we know, and much more difficult to feel threatened by a person we have met, talked and prayed with.

Lydia Obolensky-D'Aloisio

Reflections on the Seminar "Mission in Eastern Europe"

1-7 November 2004, Belgorod – Stary Oskol (Russia)

Syndesmos has contributed to the revitalisation of mission in the Orthodox Church during 20th century. As Syndesmos' founders were inviting the Orthodox youth to rediscover and to experience the catholicity of the Church, they realised the missionary dimension and responsibility of their faith. As they were urging for unity, they discovered the link between unity and mission. The following words, pronounced at the fourth General Assembly of Syndesmos in 1958 by John Meyendorff, then President of Syndesmos, are very significant: "If there is one Truth, we must be united in believing in this Truth and if there is one Truth, we must let others know it and not keep it selfishly to ourselves". The delegates of this Assembly took a formal decision to create 'International Orthodox Missionary Society'. Since then, mission has always been one of the main concerns of Syndesmos. A recommendation to focus its work again on mission was made to the Board of Administration during our last General Assembly held in Albania in July 2003. Consequently, Syndesmos Board decided to implement a 4-year programme devoted to mission, which was inaugurated by the seminar in Belgorod on "Mission in Eastern Europe".

What were the aims of the seminar on "Mission in eastern Europe"? Our mission is preaching the gospel, the good news, in any context and any time, for all people without exception. But, if the seed of the gospel is invariable and immutable, the fields, in which the seed is sowed, are very various. Thus mission must have different external forms depending on the "field", in which you sow. The main aim of this seminar was to identify the



The participants together with the clergy of Belgorod diocese and parishioners of Christ's Nativity Church in Stary Oskol.



Questions to metropolitan Paul.

particularities and the obstacles for mission of the post-communist countries, which have gone through many changes during the last decades. Since the fall of totalitarian regimes, the Church has recovered freedom. However, one can still feel the weight of a recent past. Many people say that freedom of thought, expression, conscience, criticism, initiative is still fragile in post communist societies. Consequently it is still also fragile and needs consolidating in the frame of the Church. Despite very positive external signs of vitality, many aspects of the church life continue to constitute serious obstacles for authentic mission and witness in these societies, such as lack of freedom, of dialogue, of liturgical awareness, of catechism, of authentic eucharistic communities.

The seminar took place 01 – 07 November 2004, in Belgorod, on the invitation of archbishop John of Belgorod and Sary Oskol, who is the head of the mission department of the Moscow Patriarchate. About forty participants coming from more than 10 countries attended this seminar, accompanied by resource persons that had strong experience in missionary activities, such as Nathan Hoppe, an American theologian, missionary in Albania, or father George Kotchetkov, rector of the St. Philaret Orthodox Christian Institute of Moscow and professor of Missiology and Catechism. Some students and professors of the Belgorod Seminary, which has a special missionary orientation, participated in the event. However, the aim of the seminar was not only to gather "mission specialists", and people already involved in missionary work. Quite a few young people from different local churches, who have never even thought about their missionary responsibility, and maybe have never heard about mission, were present in Belgorod. It was extremely important for us to have them with us in Belgorod, because we believe that mission is not only an issue for specialists. Each Christian is called to mission and to witness the word of God in his/ her own personal context.

The first keynote speech on "The theology of Mission" was delivered by metropolitan Paul of Akkar (Lebanon-Syria, Patriarchate of Antioch). He based his speech on an excerpt from the Gospel according to St. Luke (Lk 4: 16 – 21) and explained the missionary responsibility of each Christian.

Nathan Hoppe gave the second keynote speech "The Challenges for Mission in the Post-Communities Societies". He depicted the

situation of the society and the Church he had experienced in these countries and pointed out some landmarks for Orthodox mission in the given conditions. He developed in a workshop some concrete technical points in missionary work (see text above).

During the different workshops on "mission and catechism", "mission and youth work", "globalisation", participants discussed with great interest the most essential issues of Christian life, such as missionary responsibility of each baptised person, catechism for adult people, theological training of catechists, methods of addressing an unknown audience.

The seminar ended with the celebration of the Liturgy of Saint James in the church of the Belgorod Seminary, with the participation of the seminarists. This celebration, which required a serious preparation of all the participants (father George Kotchetkov's experience of this liturgy was very helpful and beneficial), emphasized the eucharistic dimension of mission.

A positive result of this seminar was the fact that all the people present agreed on the urgent need for missionary work in post-communist countries. Still, we should regret that a narrow and stereotyped vision of mission prevails among the Orthodox faithful, e.g. organising a trip to a remote place with no or few functioning churches in order to hold services there and return home immediately. Surely this kind of spectacular short-term mission to remote areas is interesting. But in many places, mission should start on the doorstep of the churches as well as on our own doorsteps, and it should be a long term, patient missionary process, based on mutual trust and personal relationship. Too often do we forget that the "World" in need of Christ's gospel is at our very doors. If we indeed want to do our best in order to bring people to Christ, we must realise and accept that in our own parishes some current habits - liturgical services that are difficult to understand and leave no space for people's participation, liturgical ritualism and formalism, clericalism, gospel not preached, no awareness of the eucharistic community, etc. - tend to hide Christ rather than to preach Him to the world.

In many situations in the Orthodox Church these obstacles are still great; and thus our mission work and achievements are still weak and hesitant. Let us hope that we will soon overcome them in peace of heart and serenity.

Cyrille Sollogoub



The communion at the liturgy of St. James.



Calendar 2005

UP-COMING EVENTS

World Day of Prayer for Creation

1 September 2005, International

International day of prayer & reflection on our responsibility as stewards of God's creation. The Church tries to promote a Eucharistic understanding of our relation with the environment.

"Unity in diversity: being different, being together"

Youth encounter between Orthodox and Oriental Orthodox

22-27 September 2005, Armenia

Participants: 15 from around the world + 10 from Armenia

An international youth event in Armenia, by providing opportunity for sharing and debate on issues that are close to young people's concerns, will give the Fellowship a better awareness of local realities and needs, and will allow practical involvement of the local youth (newly welcomed in Syndesmos) in its activities. This encounter also offers the possibility of meeting and exchange between the youth of both Church families in the hope of better understanding of each other and the restoration of unity in due course.

No more applications are accepted

Training Missions - The Challenge of Outreach on the Indian Subcontinent

3-9 November 2005, India

Participants: 10 from around the world + 20 from Asia

The Board of Administration of Syndesmos continues its effort to act upon the recommendation of the last General Assembly to put "a greater emphasis on world mission and evangelisation during its term of office." The seminar in India will be a place for discussions, consultations and exchange on issue of mission in the multifaceted Asian reality. By this event Syndesmos intends also to intensify the contacts with its Oriental Orthodox member movements in the region.

Application deadline: 01 September 2005

Youth leadership training

28 December 2005-3 January 2006, Kenya

Participants: 10 from around the world + 20 from Africa

The need for well-prepared youth and trained leaders in the Church never ceases. Syndesmos wants once again to be together with the missionary African churches and assist in the formation of the new generation of church workers.

Application deadline: 01 October 2005

All projects in the Calendar are subject to change or cancellation without notice. A fee is payable for participation in Syndesmos events, for the specific amounts of the fees and other details, please, consult our website. The participants are responsible for their travel and visa expenses.

SYNDESMOS

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Application Form

PLEASE TYPE OR WRITE IN CAPITAL LETTERS

I am interested in participating in the following project(s) [specify project title and dates]:.....

.....

Name of Youth Organisation & Orthodox Church:.....

.....

Mr/Mrs/Fr etc:..... First Name:..... Family name:.....

Address:..... City:

Zip Code:..... Country:.....

Telephone:..... Fax:..... Email:.....

Nationality: Date of Birth:.....

Passport number:.....

Date of issue:..... Date expires:.....

Languages spoken:.....

I would like to participate in the project(s) for the following reason(s):

.....

Indicate previous Syndesmos events you had participated in, if any

.....

I understand that Syndesmos will contact me if my application is accepted.

Signature:..... Date:.....

Please, complete and return this form to Syndesmos no later than the deadline indicated. All projects in the Calendar are subject to change or cancellation without notice.

Member Activities Reports

"Religion and Politics" – Syndesmos Northern European Gathering in Helsinki

Finnish Syndesmos member movements - Orthodox Youth Association (ONL), Orthodox Student Association (OOL) and Student Fellowship of the Orthodox Theological Department (PISTIS) - organised a Northern European regional Syndesmos gathering in Helsinki 28 – 30 January 2005. The event gathered about 30 participants from Finland, Estonia, Poland and Belgium to celebrate the World Day of Orthodox Youth and to reflect on the theme "Religion and Politics". In a clear way this was the follow-up meeting of the seminar "Educating for Europe. In this world, not of this world: what does the European citizenship mean to us?" which took place 28 October – 02 November in Pärnu (Estonia) and was supported by the European Youth Foundation (see the article on p.6). It was a joy to have Christopher (the president of Syndesmos) and Lydia D'Aloisio among us during the weekend.

The event began with a visit to the parliament of Finland. Ms. Elena Gorschkow, minister of foreign affairs assistant, (and former intern in Syndesmos General Secretariat in Bialystok where she helped with the preparation of the 16th general assembly (Valamo, Finland, 1999) moderated a discussion on the topic of relations between one's personal conviction (of faith) and political activity. Later in the evening the conversation continued in a typical Northern European way: in the heat of sauna.

Two speeches on the theme "Religion and Politics" were delivered during the weekend. Dr. Johannes Remy, professor of history, speculated on the relation between Orthodoxy and nationalism. According to him, the concepts of Orthodoxy and national awareness are not fully opposite to each other. But nationalistic concerns



Discussion about the role of Syndesmos in building the unity of the Church.

contain a serious risk: if they start to dominate and influence choices and opinions in the internal life of the church. Hierodeacon Seraphim, who had then newly returned from the Holy Land, presented the second speech. The organisers had asked him to share his impressions and thoughts about the religious and political situation in the Holy Land, with the idea that any problem of the church in any place of the globe is our own problem. Hierodeacon Seraphim stated that similarly to Europe, Christians, Muslims and Jews in the Holy Land are struggling with the same problem: secularisation. Simultaneously, nationalistic views are often strong among Christian churches, and it does not help to pacify the situation of the Church in Holy Land.

Both speeches addressed the questions of nationalism in the Church as potential or actual source of problems, and this idea was discussed in small workshops. It appeared that before we can hope for a better understanding of national feeling in the church, we should try and find

some answers in the society. There seems to be many interrelations of the society and the church on that matter: when the society is inhabited by nationalistic trends, the same trends are present in the church. When there is a social consensus that sees nationalism as something potentially dangerous, the same general attitude is reflected in the church.

On Saturday evening we participated in the vigil service in the church of St. Herman of Alaska in Espoo. After the vigil, Christopher D'Aloisio moderated a discussion about the role of Syndesmos in building the unity of the Church. The main concern on the way to the unity was the isolation and self-sufficiency of the local churches instead of fruitful cooperation. Furthermore, this decreases the possibilities of the churches to substantially influence the burning issues of the society. It was also agreed that mutual respect, unity and love among local churches is a condition for preaching the Christian message.

The gathering ended with the Divine Liturgy in the Assumption of the Mother

of God Cathedral in Helsinki. This event served continuation of cooperation and deepening the vital relations between youth movements and young people from different local churches. It also gave a lot of energy to continue the mission of youth movements in the Northern Europe.

Outi Vasko

Celebrating the World Day of Orthodox Youth in New York.

On February 13th, over 15 young adults from various Syndesmos member movements in the New York City area gathered together for a celebration in honor of the World Day of Orthodox Youth. Our host for the event was Fr. James Moskovites and the parish of the Annunciation on the Upper West Side of Manhattan. This is the second regional event we have had at the parish and as always, Fr. James and the community have been so warm in their hospitality.

We were blessed to have a keynote offered by Father Michael Anderson, the director of the Orthodox Church in America (OCA) Department of Youth, Young Adult, and Campus Ministries. Fr. Michael offered some thoughts to the participants regarding the role of youth in the Orthodox Church and how the youth might be of service to the Church. For many of the participants, the event was the first time they had ever heard of Syndesmos or the World Day of Orthodox Youth.

We had participants attend from as far away as Pennsylvania and New Jersey. Many of the young adults who participated enjoyed the event and appreciated the atmosphere of good fellowship and service. As part of the event, participants had been asked to make and bring "Gift of the Heart" health kits for the victims of the tsunami that swept Asia in December. These health kits were requested by International Orthodox Christian Charities (IOCC) as part of their humanitarian efforts in

response to the devastation left by the tsunami. The kits consisted of a sealable plastic bag filled with such basic necessities as small towels, soap, toothpaste, and a toothbrush. The young adults were very generous as we managed to collect more kits than we had participants. Everyone agreed that this was a great way of celebrating the World Day of Orthodox Youth and of remembering our brothers and sisters around the world.

Pantelis Kostoulas

World Day of Orthodox Youth celebration in Moscow. Meeting friends on the day of the Meeting of the Lord.

Last February (2005) an informal youth gathering was held in a big concert Hall of the Pilgrims Centre of the Patriarchate of Moscow, near Moscow University. It was organised by the Youth of Saint Cosma and Damian parish (Moscow, Syndesmos associated member Movement). The meeting was totally informal, it was the first of such kind in this venue and it simply gathered young Christians who wanted to witness their faith together. The idea was that they should be allowed to do that in a

way that was most natural for them, therefore no strict programme was imposed on them. This is how the gathering ended up being a concert that displayed every possible variety of performers and styles. The very variety of the programme was a significant feature of that evening. "Look how different we are! And yet, we celebrate God together!" This could have been said by any of the participants that day.

There were two different reasons for organising that meeting at that time of the year: the first reason was the World Day of Orthodox Youth that is celebrated by Syndesmos member movements and Orthodox youth in general all around the world on the feast day of the meeting of the Lord (02 February). The second reason was the 70th anniversary of Father Alexander Men (a famous orthodox priest, theologian and thinker, who was assassinated on the 9 September 1990).

The concert was opened by a word of welcome by Father Alexander Borisov, rector of Saint Cosma and Damian parish (Moscow), who spoke to the audience about the meaning of meeting someone in the real sense of the word; about the kind of meeting that can



One of the programme items.

change the whole life of a person. He told the audience about his meeting and friendship with Father Alexander Men (they had known each other since their childhood), about some characteristics of Fr. Alexander Men's personality, his serious and deep concern about young people and their questions and needs, his interest for the specific culture of young generations, the way he always took time to speak with young people who came and visited him, using a language that was always adapted to their needs and expectations.

It is probably thanks to that particular preoccupation of Father Alexander Men that it became possible to put together a very multi-coloured and yet harmonious concert programme, that proposed very sophisticated pieces of classical music as well as lighter jazz improvisations. The same concert also featured some songs by "Eslif (If)", the famous rock group of Stas Bartenev, as well as a performance by a youth choir of Olga Arefiev group. It was a real "from Rock to Barocco" night. Above the stage everyone could see and contemplate the icon of the feast of the Meeting of the Lord, and also a photograph of Father Alexander Men.

The experiment of an informal Christian concert had seemed a bit uncertain or even risky to some of the observers, but experience proves that the idea can be very fruitful, and it would even seem very wise and beneficial indeed to try it again.

Anastasia Beltiukova

Conference "Youth in the Church: Problems and the Ways to Solve Them"

16-21 February 2005, Moscow (Russia)

A conference called "Youth in the Church: Problems and the Ways to Solve Them" was opened on February 16th, 2005, at Danilovsky Monastery in Moscow. The conference was organised by the Patriarchal Center for Spiritual Development of Children and Youth, in cooperation with the Synodal Department

for Youth Affairs, and All Church Orthodox Youth Movement (ACOYM, Syndesmos Affiliated Member) and was scheduled for the Feast of the Meeting of the Lord*.

The leaders and members of Youth departments from 25 dioceses of the Orthodox Church in Russia as well as the clergymen and laymen representing 7 international and national religious and public youth organizations took part in the conference. The total number of participants was over 90 people.

The main aim of the conference was to achieve unity among Orthodox youth leaders in their perception of contemporary problems of the young people in the Church and possible methods for solving these problems.

This conference was the continuation of a youth camp, called "Feodorovsky Gorodok", which has taken place annually in Ruzha for the past several years. Orthodox youth leaders from throughout the Russian Federation, together with some young Orthodox Christians, come to Ruzha for an exchange of experience regarding youth work. This year's event was an exceptional one.

During the conference, we were trying to work on four very important documents: 'The General Conception of Human Spiritual Development', 'Mission, Catechism and Religious Education of Modern Youth', 'The Basic Types and Methods of Youth Work', and 'The Church Community, Liturgical Life and the Christian Community'. These documents, taken together, might be considered as a basis for 'The Conception of Youth Work in the Orthodox Church'.

All of us, both clergy and young Christians, felt the spirit of Christian unity in this work. We felt an affirmation of being responsible for the future of our Church and of being able to change something in the present situation; this was critical as the current situation is still reflecting the effects of many years of the communist regime in Russia, which persecuted the Church. The work of this conference was very strong. We spent a lot of the time in reading, revising, and re-reading the documents' texts. Some elements of these texts were created during the Syndesmos Seminar "Mission in Easter Europe" in November 2004 in Belgorod, Russia.

It was a pleasant surprise to see how enthusiastically the young people were



The participants write the statements of the conference.



Presentation of youth organisations.

working. We used to think that young people prefer to spend time with entertainments, not with hard work. Fortunately, our work wasn't just paperwork. We also had some minutes for smiles and entertainment. Andrey Selivanov, an Orthodox singer who is well known in Russia, performed a concert. The cultural program of the Conference also included a special contest filled with funny sketches and improvisations and a farewell party. One of the most important results of the Conference was the building of living connections and contacts between youth leaders of different dioceses.

On the night of the 19th and into the morning of the 20th of February, an All-night Vigil and Divine Liturgy was celebrated, in Ruzha, in the church of St. Demetrios, the Great-Martyr of Thessalonica. The clergy of the Ruzha district together with the clergy participating in the conference, the youth choir, and the conference participants worshipped together and partook of the Holy Gifts. This was truly a fitting ending to our event.

As a conclusion to our work on the documents, the Synod of the Orthodox Church in Russia researched the documents, approved this work, and

blessed the participants. We hope this work will help to build a good future in our church life.

It's impossible to express all the details of such a wonderful event in this small article. People who understand Russian are welcome to read the documents on the website: <http://www.cdrm.ru/conf/> The Synod's approval can be found here: <http://www.mospat.ru/text/news/id/8998.html>

Fr Alexander Dyagilev,
Saint-Petersburg.

*According to Julian calendar in use in Russia, the feast of 2nd February is celebrated on 15th February.

Secretary of MGOCSM ordained as metropolitan

Most Rev. Dr. M. C. Cherian, the Secretary General of Mar Gregorios Orthodox Christian Student Movement (one of Syndesmos Federated Member Movements in India), was ordained as metropolitan of the Syro-Malankara Church of India by H. H. Basilios Mar-Thoma Mathews II, Catholicos of the East, on 05 March 2005. The ordination was carried out in Parumala Seminary Church with assistance of the Holy Episcopal Synod. Father M. C. Cherian was given the name Zachariah Mar

Theophilos. Also three other clerics of Syro-Malankara Church were ordained as bishops on the same occasion.

H.G. Zachariah Mar Theophilos was born on 16 September 1952. After post-graduating from Kerala University (M.A.) he proceeded with his theological studies (B.D. and M.Th.) in Serampore University and then accomplished his Doctoral Studies in Ministry (D.Min.) at Saint Vladimir's Orthodox Theological Seminary in New York, U.S.A. On 07 August 2004 he was elevated as Ramban (an ecclesiastical dignitary). Mar Theophilos is well known for his work in Mar Gregorios Orthodox Christian Student Movement (MGOCSM) since 1979 at different capacities, lately serving as Secretary General.

MGOCSM, which is the student and youth mission wing of the Syro-Malankara Church, organizes symposiums, seminars, study classes, conferences, discussion forums, workshops and many other activities at church, diocese and parish levels both nationally and internationally



Fr Cherian at the XVII General Assembly (GA) of Syndesmos.

for children, youth and students.

We pray the Lord to bless the mission of the new bishops of Syro-Malankara Church and to grant them many years!

Prof. E. Jacob John
and Jooa Vuorinen based on materials
of the website
<http://www.lightoflife.com>

Celebration of the World Day of Orthodox Youth in Brussels

The 5th March this year a Syndesmos local meeting with the subject 'Towards the Council' took place in Brussels, in St. John the Theologian theological Institute. Participants from Belgium, France, Germany, the Netherlands and Greece took part at this event. The meeting was held as a response of the call of the Syndesmos General Secretariat to held local consultations to gather ideas and proposals in order to contribute to the preparation of the Great Council of the Orthodox Church.

The day debuted with a divine liturgy in the parish of St. Siluan of Athos and St. Martin of Tours, held in different languages and musical traditions, several priests of different dioceses and jurisdictions concelebrated and presided by bishop Athenagoras of Sinope, auxiliary of Metropolitan Panteleimon

of Belgium. After the liturgy, bishop Athenagoras addressed the participants and underlined the importance of the preparation of a council and said that it was impossible to unify the orthodox on a national basis. Then a meal was offered in the parish.

In the afternoon, Spyros Tsimouris (Syndesmos Vice-president) spoke about different subjects of concern for our Church today, which he thinks obstruct our witness to the world. It was a very challenging talk, which could have sounded very severe in its frankness if it had not been, in fact, a constructive criticism which was intended to move each of us to an increased involvement and to entice us to face our own responsibility for our Church. In his opinion, many present debates in our Church are similar to actual ideological battles, which absorb our entire energy and distract us all from the real goal, which is our life in Christ and the witness about Him to the world. He made a list of topics, which, to his opinion, are a problem for our Church today:

- one has come to consider canonical rules to be more important than love and personal communion of persons;
- a certain interpretation of tradition makes it to an idol or a lifeless ideology, separated from its eschatological perspective;

- a serious ignorance of the foundations of our faith give the faithful a false image of the Church as a "machine of sacraments";

- the lack of conciliarity brings with it a resurgence of clericalism and the developing of the heresy of nationalism in the Church;

- the ministry of women is not enough considered;

- there is an insufficient participation in the ecumenical movement because of the lack of understanding of the orthodox between themselves.

Finally, Spyros Tsimouris denounced the tendency to a "party mentality" that makes it impossible to concentrate on the real urgent matters that need our attention, as for example a more conscious participation of lay people in the life of the Church and the liturgical renewal. After his talk, the participants were divided into two groups, each of which discussed and developed some of the points of the speech.

As conclusion of the meeting, the president of Syndesmos, Christopher D'Aloisio, made a presentation of the objectives of Syndesmos and of the calendar of activities this year. The day ended with Vespers, again in different languages and musical traditions.

It was a rich day, which gave to think to many of the participants, contributed to form and develop brotherly contacts and gave us all an occasion to ask ourselves the question: what can I personally do in the Church – with other words, what is my contribution to the Council?

Alexandra Popescu



The speech of Spyros Tsimouris.

Acer-MJO conference 27-29 may 2005. Theology in Western Europe.

From May 27 to May 29 2005, Acer-MJO (Syndesmos affiliated member movement) organised a conference with no theme, but a title: "Let us come and discuss, says the Lord" (Is: 1,18).

The conference gathered 50 people from France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Germany, with members of Acer-MJO

(France), Saint John the Theologian Theological Institute (Belgium), OJB (Germany).

One of the reasons for organising such an event was very common to all orthodox communities around the world: many people feel the need to take some time and discuss theological matters, with different perspectives: some persons want to deepen their understanding of their own faith, some other want to be more prepared to speak out about their faith to those around them who could be interested. All these people are well qualified in their professional field, they are capable to assimilate complex theological thought, but often lack systematic knowledge. A conference with theological thematic is extremely useful for that kind of persons as a catechesis for adults.

One of the other reasons for organising a conference is that Acer-MJO can see that there is a real need, in the Orthodox Church, to provide the faithful with a space where they can come together (there is such a specific quality in any thinking that is done together, by people who strive to go forward together, and to build and create together), and put their thought, knowledge and concerns together, in the service of the Church. This space must be free it must allow fruitful creativity, and at the same time it must be in the church. It is a space that the church gives to her people so that her people serve her better, and through her, serve Christ better. Often in the past Acer-MJO has offered such a space to its members and to all interested persons. The conference organised by Acer-MJO in May was one on that chain of conferences. There is also a very specific context for the Acer-MJO conference, which is the status of theology in those circles in Western Europe that have been influenced and still live in the light of the inheritance of the theologians of the so-called "Paris school" of theology and of orthodox theologians that have lived, worked, created in Western Europe (or

later for some of them in the United States of America), (such as Nicholas Berdiaev, Fr. Sergius Bulgakov, Fr. Nicholas Afanassiev, Lev Zander, Wladimir Lossky, Paul Evdokimov, Fr Alexander Schmemmann, Fr John Meyendorf, Fr. Basil Zenkovsky, even Saint Mary Skobtsova and many others...)

Quite a few person, in Western Europe have been brought up by those theologians in the strict meaning of that word: theologians in the 1930's, 1940's etc., used to see as their theologian's duty the education of children and young adults in summer camps, and all kind of youth activities. They also used to organise conferences and seminars that were open not only to specialists, but also to families, young people, and anyone interested. Now in the communities where these theologians used to be active, there are several generations of faithful, laymen as well as clergymen, who were brought up by these theologians. Even when these generations of "pupils" they do not have an academic theological education, they still have a theological vision of life in the church, and understand that every second of life is part of the church life. This was called "putting church into daily life", and it served as a motto for several generations of people.

For some years now, Acer-MJO had not organised theological conferences. Many persons that had had the opportunity to benefit from such conferences in the past felt the urge to start conferences again, because it was felt like one of the most important aspects of the education that is given to new generations of orthodox Christians in the activities of Acer-MJO.

The aim of the May conference was to discuss a wide range of topics, in order to define a priority or a direction for further meetings of the same kind. The conference invited such resource persons as Dr. Michel Stavrou (St. Sergius Theological Institute, Paris),

Christopher D'Aloisio (St John the Theologian Theological Institute, Brussels), John Tchekan (Orthodox Press Service SOP), Nikita Struve (YMCA-Press, Vestnik), as well as a Catholic theologian, Dominique Collin, o.p. (Universty of Louvain la Neuve). Among the themes addressed were: "The Christian faith is not a normative religion", "Put Church into daily life", "How we can change the world", "Is it possible to be creative with Liturgical tradition?", "How to bear a common witness among all Christians".

The conference went well, in a good atmosphere and provided ground for many fruitful discussions, it was agreed that such conference would happen again in a very near future.

Lydia Obolensky-D'Aloisio.

Indonesia

Fr Matthew Bambang, Orthodox priest of the Diocese of Hong-Kong and South-East Asia and member at large of Syndesmos Board of Administration (regional representative for Asia) has reported very unhappy news from his community. At night on 1st June 2005, 15 fundamentalist Muslims came to the Church of St. Catherine in Cilacap, Central Java, in order to close down the church.

Despite Fr Matthew's efforts to negotiate with them, the church had to be



Fr Matthew among the participants of the XVII Syndesmos GA (second from right).

closed. The community of the church, 30 believers, is now not able to use their own church for celebrating the Divine Liturgy or any service. Father Matthew

asks us all to pray for them, so that the community would get their church back and would be able to carry on their liturgical life. Let us also pray for the

peace between Christian and Muslim communities in Indonesia and all over the world.

**"You feel deep concern"
To the youth in Vienna, Austria, 10.09.1983**



The world and time in which we are living today present a major challenge for you. You feel deep concern about the misery and hunger prevailing in many parts of the globe as well as about the extent of injustice.

You are sounding a warning against the deadly threat of gigantic arm arsenals and imminent nuclear war.

You care about the environment. You know that many people, primarily the young, either fear losing their jobs or are already out of work. In other countries, many are oppressed spiritually and cannot profess their faith in freedom. Given these circumstances, some feel that life offers little hope and little meaning. Some seek to shirk their responsibility by indulging in passion pleasures or the world of illusions created by alcohol and drugs, by casual sexual relationships, indifference, cynicism, or violence. To some, suicide seems to be the ultimate way out of a dilemma.

But, as someone put it, the darkest hour is before dawn. However the difficulties of our time arouse in many people, particularly in the young, the most ambitious dreams, the strongest forces of the spirit, the heart and the hands. This stimulates readiness to share and to dedicate their lives unselfishly.

Throughout the world people have begun to ask themselves and others: What can I do? What can we do? Where is our path leading us? It is mainly young people who raise these questions. They want to make their contribution to healing a very tired and sick society. Thus they instil a new meaning into their lives and into the lives of their friends. To many of them this meaning already bears a name: the name of "Jesus Christ". They have found Jesus Christ. He has become their new hope. Other young people, however, are seeking Jesus Christ. It is you who ought to guide them toward him.

*From "The Holy Father Speaks to Youth 1980-1985",
Bulletin of the Pontifical Council of the Laity
"The Laity Today", Vatican City 30 – 1985*

Respecting Human Dignity and Integrity: Gender and Theological Perspectives on Human Rights

This was the name of the World Student Christian Federation – Europe Region (WSCF-Europe, partner of Syndesmos in TEAMS ecumenical consortium) conference that took place in Vilnius, Lithuania on 18-24 April this year. About 45 young people around Europe and from different churches came together to study and discuss human rights. In the conference program there were many lectures given by specialists of the topic, debates, workshops, leisure time activities and, what is important, common worship carried out according to each tradition represented, as well as prepared by the participants from different denominations together.

The conference had two main themes, the first of them being human rights in general. In the beginning we heard a lecture on the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. The Declaration was formulated and launched in 1948 by United Nations, which at that time consisted of mostly western countries. Therefore it is good to discuss, whether the declaration is really universal or if it represents only western ideology. According to the examples that the lecturer, Swedish ethicist and Lutheran pastor Elizabeth Gerle, pointed out, in different cultures also the rights of human beings may be different. Another theologian, German Holger Lahayne, addressed stated that when it comes to the Biblical definition of humanity, based on Genesis 1:26-27, and to the indication that all humans were created in the image of God, the same dignity and rights should be granted to every human being.

Another theological approach on human rights was given by Kristina Ivanauskiene, a Lithuanian theologian, who spoke from the feminist theological point-of-view about masculine God-imagery in the Bible and liturgy. She also mentioned women's efforts in the Church to create a new, more tolerant and equal atmosphere among men and women, clergy and laity in many Christian communities.

The second main theme of the conference was trafficking of women. Trafficking is a name given to an illegal business where people are transported from their home countries abroad to work illegally in factories, agriculture and

prostitution. It is a modern form of slavery and according to the estimations there can be over 70 million people working as slaves around the world. Most of them are women and children, and most of the trafficked women have to work as prostitutes.

Both Esohe Aghatise, a Nigerian lawyer living and working in Italy among trafficked women, and Lithuanian Dovile Rukaite from the Women's issues Centre concentrated in their lectures on trafficking of women. In Europe, Italy is one of the main target countries of trafficking, and the biggest ethnic group of trafficked women there are Nigerian women. Also Lithuania is heavily involved in trafficking as a source country. Usually women, who become victims of trafficking, come from poorer countries with low social security. For trafficked women it is very difficult to find a way out of prostitution; they have been transported to the country illegally with forged documents and therefore they are outside of the civil rights of that country. Legislation makes the situation even more difficult, because it punishes those, who practice prostitution, and not those who buy sex services – this means promotion of prostitution. If a trafficked woman gets caught by police, in most of the cases she is sent back to her home country, where her social status is not good at all, and in the end she will probably return back to the "market".

Trafficking is a great problem also in many countries with predominant Orthodox population, i.e. Romania, and as Christians we should do everything we can to stop human trafficking and other means of depriving human rights of our neighbours. Many times we may think that we are too small to do something, but even the smallest actions can make a difference – both in good and evil. This was addressed very strongly in the last lecture of the conference, given by Lene Hopland Bergset who works with the youth program of Norwegian Church Aid (Christian philanthropic organisation). She brought out ways how we can change the



Prayer time

situation with trafficking and prostitution in the world by increasing our own and other people's awareness and knowledge of these issues. It was good and inspiring to finish the conference with the title of her lecture: "Of Course, We Can Change the World".

Jooa Vuorinen

Syndesmos

Internship Programme

The General Secretariat invites interested young people to apply for Syndesmos Internship Programme in the period 2005 – 2007.

The programme implies short-term work (up to 2 months) in the General Secretariat in Athens in the following fields:

- publications and information
- archives and data base development
- assistance in preparation and implementation of the events.

An applicant should meet the following basic requirements:

- experience in international youth cooperation (participation and organisation of meetings and projects)
- dedication, reliability and spirit of cooperation
- fluency in English
- good computer skills

The applications will be considered individually as they arrive. An application should include:

- statement of motivation
- CV
- recommendation letter

The General Secretariat retains its freedom in selection of the applicants according to its capacity and convenience.

Please, send your applications to:

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THE WORLD FELLOWSHIP OF ORTHODOX YOUTH

SYNDESMOS

CALL FOR LOCAL CONSULTATIONS

with the title

"Towards the Council..." Urgent issues in the Church

The catholicity of the universal Church springs from the conciliarity of local church communities. Unfortunately, we have to admit that the gift of conciliarity is not actualised at present either in the context of the local Orthodox Churches or at the pan-Orthodox level.

At the same time there are a number of burning issues in the pan-Orthodox family, which remain unresolved after decades and form a heavy burden both for clergy and all the faithful.

Bearing these facts in mind Syndesmos Board of Administration decided to launch a 4-year programme of consultations on the theme "Towards the Council... Urgent issues in the Church." Several international meetings in this theme took place in Europe in 2004-2005.

Clearly understanding that this discussion should not be limited to the meetings of the Board, Syndesmos Board of Administration renews its call on Syndesmos member movements and all interested Orthodox youth and laity organisations to hold local consultations on the same theme.

These consultations do not have to be highly official, as there is a risk of them becoming a formality. They should be an expression of deep concerns of the people of God at the present moment. It is highly desired to have wherever possible both clergy and laity, as well as representatives of different age, sex, ethnic groups present during these consultations. Above all we call you to engage in the discussions with the spirit of creative daring and respect to the catholicity and truth abiding in the Body of Christ.

We also ask you to provide the Syndesmos General Secretariat with reports giving account on the results of these consultations. On the basis of these reports we will produce a synopsis of this precious discussion process for the use of the Church. We hope that this synopsis will be a valuable contribution for the preparation of the Great Council of the Orthodox Church.

Please, send the reports to:

Syndesmos General Secretariat

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