

## **The Orthodox Movements Association**

In the late 1940s, Fr. Alexander Schemann (Russian) met with Nikos Nisiotis (Greek) and the writer of these lines in Europe after feeling that the movements of Orthodox youths around the world need to have more unity and coordination. We launched the idea in a bigger meeting in the suburbs of Geneva. We called this movement “Syndesmos”, which means “the bond”, and we took this name from the expression “bond of peace” that Paul used in Ephesians 4: 3.

It includes now 120 youth movements in addition to Theological institutes from fifty countries. The movement was blessed by the heads of all our churches. The Association revived preaching in pagan nations. It supported Orthodox unity and supported the faithful to have Holy Communion. It also took care of environmental issues. The general assembly meets every four years to elect its administrative body and choose the subjects it suggests on the movements to study.

The last general assembly was held between 15 and 25 July in the Transfiguration monastery, Valamo (Finland). Around 250 delegates came from all over our East, Europe, America and Africa, in addition to representatives from the Oriental Churches (non-Chalcedonic). They were distributed into groups that studied secularism, ecclesiastic traditions and habits, liturgical language, inter-Christian dialogue, social service, laics in Church, Ethical values, Theological institutes, and Orthodoxy & Environment. We were around ten from the Antiochian Church. A president, general secretary and a helping staff were elected. Then, a group went as pilgrims to Russia, to the old Monastery of Valamo situated on the Ladoga Lake next to Petersburg.

The atmosphere of the monastery was amazing in an area of 300 Hectares of land. It is visited by many pilgrims coming from the Orthodox Church of Finland that has around sixty thousand Finnish believers in addition to 150 thousand foreigners (Greeks, Bulgarians, Romanians...). It is a very active Church that has a kind of autonomy under the Patriarchate of Constantinople (i.e. the Ecumenical Patriarchate agrees on the election of the Archbishop while the local Council elects the bishops of the Archdioceses and runs the issues of the Church without going back to Constantinople). Orthodox Theology is taught in an independent faculty that is a part of the state university. All of their priests are intellectual. Piety is obvious. Their liturgical style in performing and composition is Russian because Finnish Orthodox believers were a part of the Church of Moscow before the Russian Revolution. They have a lot of energy and no complex of minority (knowing that we are only 1% of the Finnish people).

This fusion between the youths of all around the world was beautiful. We used many languages because of the presence of many nations. Of course, some of the representative groups were more open and flexible such as the Antiochian

group, and in comparison with those some conservative closed tendencies appeared. However, the Orthodox unity was obvious.

The importance of this association is that it is a tool of revival in Churches; it spreads its thoughts in the Orthodox world which is one world distributed into regional units. Here, we have a geographic unit that includes all Arabic youth movements between the Churches of Alexandria, Antioch and Jerusalem. We hope that the influence of the Syndesmos would become stronger between our Churches and become heard by the spiritual authorities. Perhaps the coming four years would give all our Churches more whiffs from the Divine Spirit.

Metropolitan George of Mount Lebanon