

preached at by "western" churches. This challenge must be countered by the Orthodox Church in East Europe, which must present a clear understanding of the Orthodox faith today, and its relevance to 20th Century life. Thirdly, he mentioned the challenge of secularism, commenting that there is a lack of reference to religious values in many lives today. There is therefore a need to develop a theology with a clear link between intellectuality and spirituality. Yet this spiritually must not be seen as a "compartment" or section of religious life to be indulged in only when necessary, but rather an attitude to life which embraces all. In this regard he pointed to the energy of youth movements and the role that they have in instilling this attitude in young believers. There was a strong contingent of young Romanians at the Festival, some of whom came from the Romanian Orthodox Youth League (ROYAL). There are at least three other Orthodox youth/student movements in Romania that have also

appeared since the "revolution". What is clear is that young people, and perhaps especially students, are looking for a voice with which to shape their political future. What remains unclear, at least to me, is how these various groups (a) interact and (b) relate to state and church.

Solidarity

The final fast, liturgy and feast was the highlight of the Festival, regardless of the pain it caused. It was the highlight not just because of the beauty of the liturgy, or the mystery of the sacrament, but because it reminded me that wherever there is pain, wherever there is misunderstanding, or wherever there is fear and hatred, so long as there is love and care, respect and a deep desire to listen there will always be the possibility to go beyond the gulfs that divide. After the Divine Liturgy we walked back to the camp-site for the feast. As we walked, those who had become our friends during the Festival shared their blessed bread with those of us who had been unable to share in the Eucharist. This

act of friendship and solidarity was a true sign of hope, because until we act on the pain and frustration that we feel in our separation we will never come any nearer to realising the one united Church which was the dream of Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

This is not a comprehensive report, simply a short collection of experiences and high points in the Festival which helped in my understanding of the Orthodox faith. There were many more encounters and interesting experiences: we worked in small groups, coming to know about three or four other people particularly well; we talked about an Orthodox perspective on the environmental question; we swam in the Aegean sea and sang around a camp-fire; we picked almonds, strawberries and figs; we talked about the relationship between hierarchy and "lowerarchy"; workshops were held on iconography, Slavonic music and Greek dancing; and of course friendships were developed and no doubt a few new relationships begun. A final note: as I stood in the

DanAir Queue in Athens airport at 3.00am, waiting to be checked-in for my flight to London, I could not help but make comparisons with the final night of the Festival. In the Vigil we had had mystery behind the iconostas, sweet-smelling incense, candles and flickering light, beautiful, continual music, constant movement and a long stand. In the airport there was certainly mystery behind the check-in queues as no-one seemed to know what was happening to our flight, there was the putrid smell of cigarette smoke, the flickering of neon lights, continual wailing of young children exhausted with the heat, constant comings and goings of heavily-laden travellers, and aching feet. And on both occasions there was a common goal - to reach a higher "plane". If this is the choice between secularism and religion, I certainly know where I would rather be any day, or night!

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"Celebrate! Many Gifts, One Spirit"

Having been asked/volunteered to do so, I represented WSCF-Europe at the CESCUM Gathering. I was ten days in the USA, my first ever visit to that country, and I have to say that these ten days were among the most astonishing of my life. Afterwards I was left with a lot of impressions, and still now, much later, many questions are un- or only half-answered.

Expectations

In the last few years I have

participated in several WSCF conferences and meetings. And of course when I tried to imagine beforehand what the meeting in the US would be like, I made a connection to my previous experiences in WSCF. I had heard there were 2500 participants expected, but, well, that would just make a slightly larger WSCF event. And one of the things which is always astonishing to see, when participating in WSCF events, is that although all the movements

within WSCF are different and people have very different backgrounds, participants always share common concerns and find a common base in their beliefs. The experience in this meeting however was a little different.

It started with: the venue

When I finally arrived in Louisville - after one day of flying and airports, delayed or cancelled flights and snow-storms - I could hardly believe the taxidriver

had brought me to the right place. Standing there I saw high-rises of about 20 storeys, on both sides of the road, "reaching for the sky".

I suppose I had expected to be hosted in some kind of university dormitory, or something, but the thing I was looking at now, was, as could be easily seen, a real, big 5 Star Hotel.

In the lobby - the size of a moderate football field - you had glass elevators,

which you could follow going all the way up while drinking your coffee in the bar. I was placed in a room bigger than the whole apartment I used to live in, bedroom/livingroom/bathroom, king-size doublebed, telephone, refrigerator, bar, two television sets, roomservice. "Welcome to the Galt House Hotel!"

The whole event, 2100 people, was hosted in this hotel. Also, meetings, worship, dinners, took place there. OK, perhaps we can call it "the American way", and it may have cost some money, but on the other hand: it made organising such an event quite a lot easier. All the household things and all those small practicalities were taken care of by the hotel staff. Good dinners for 2100 people at the same time. The hotel staff were obviously used to organising an event of this size.

Louisville is not so large a city, on the banks of the Ohio river, famous for its racehorses (The Kentucky Derby) and Bourbon, considered to be part of the "Upper South" of the US. The place didn't play a part in the programme.

The Gathering

The Gathering started on Friday 28 December, with a dinner, and lasted until Tuesday 1 January, after lunch. Almost 5 days. The theme was "Celebrate! Many Gifts, One Spirit" taken from 1 Corinthians 12:4-7. Organising this event was a major challenge and an enormous job for the CESC and the planning committee. In 25 years there had not been any ecumenical conference of students in the US and certainly not of this size and importance.

As the planning committee said in the programme: "In affirming our commitment to a National Ecumenical Gathering of

Student Christian Conferences, we expect that such a gathering will be an opportunity for college and university students to unite and celebrate a common belief in Jesus Christ...we want students to be stirred to understand the needs and concerns of the world and all its people... Finally we expect that this gathering will build up momentum for stronger ecumenical ties in the future..."

And sure, throughout the conference it was clear that all this was very new, and a big step for many of the participants, perhaps leading towards...? Some, especially the organisers and other leadership, were aware of the historical significance of this meeting.

In fact the whole gathering consisted of many gatherings, taking place at the same time and place. And each of the 11 represented denominations had their own national gatherings during the conference.

The programme

For each day, the programme followed the same schedule:

9.15 - Ecumenical Bible study (plenary)

10.00-16.00 - Denominational Meetings

16.15-17.45 - Ecumenical Workshops (Choice of 100, running 3 days)

18.00 - Dinner

19.45 - Ecumenical Worship

22.00 - Social/cultural events (Choice of about 20 activities, most of them different everyday)

As you can see, a significant part of the day and the conference was spent within our own denominations; the activities attended by the denominations together were called "ecumenical". In the denominational meeting-time also such activities took place as "home-groups", elections, worship, etc.

The position of the ecumenical process

As already mentioned, everything, in the ecumenical perspective, was very new and

quite revolutionary. Since the collapse of the Student Christian Movement in the US in the late '60s there has not been any ecumenical student work, although certain attempts were made. In fact, confronted with declining membership most churches in the US, and there are quite a few, reacted by turning their back on the ecumenical process and made "keeping their own flock together" or consolidating their own church membership their priority. Student work, student ministry, became an instrument in this. So what we see nowadays is almost every denomination having their own student ministry, giving several student ministries at one university, perhaps two or three of them working together. The only Christian student organisations remaining are those of the Lutheran Student Movement and the Young Women's Christian Association (YWCA).

In fact it was said that an ecumenical, or better inter-denominational meeting like this was now fortunately possible for students, but not for example for church leadership.

And you could notice, talking to the participants, that this was all very new to them, most of them strictly raised within their own denomination. They had never spoken to someone from another church, at least not asked them things about their beliefs and religion. Some members of the Episcopal (Anglican) homegroup I was in expressed their astonishment when finding out that people of the United Methodist Churches also celebrated Holy Communion regularly, and even looked upon that as something "holy" or "sacred"!!

Although maybe different from church to church and difficult in the beginning, I think a good sign was that later in the conference

people started complaining about the little time they had in the programme to meet with students of other denominations and to talk to them about things connected with belief and religion. As a member of the organising committee put it: "They are now longing for information. Just the basic facts: what do you believe and what do you do in your church."

The effort made by the organising committee and CESC while organising this event was also clear. At several stages in the process it had looked as if they were not going to succeed and some churches would no longer be within the process. In fact some churches had left it. They finally decided to have their own meeting "around the corner", but I did not see them, leaving only protestant churches represented. During the preparatory process a lot of the churches expressed the fear of losing their identity in the ecumenical process and during the conference. Some of the churches were only willing to join when this much "denominational time" was scheduled. Even who was going to preach in worship was a matter of negotiation between the different churches. This is not to sound negative but only to illustrate the efforts made by the organisers and the significance of the meeting. At the stage US churches find themselves at, organising this event and the process leading up to it is very important and a big step. We can only be grateful that this was possible.

Knowing this it is not strange that in the programme and worship the "many gifts" - the diversity - was stressed more than the "one spirit". And as far as the US participants were concerned, although the things I wrote

above are true, I noticed during one of the most "ecumenical experiences" during the conference, sitting in between two denominations, that, although people were also impressed by the moment, there was still the spirit of "that's 'our' song, let's sing it a bit louder".

For us, the so-called international guests used to the practice of WSCF and SCM-work this was all rather astonishing.

We even started to get worried after the first two days: that far, the only thing we had heard about was the diversity and the differences. One thing that specially worried us was the almost complete absence of a notion of "the World", the awareness of the fact that "oikumene" means "the whole inhabited world".

In a meeting with the organising committee we expressed our worries. They asked for understanding for the situation, but it was decided that we should make an introduction to the Lima Liturgy, to be celebrated on Sunday, in which we would try to

bring a little bit of a global and ecumenical perspective to the whole thing; and in which we would try to express that as we were sitting there we could feel ourselves not only part of an American fellowship of Christian students. I think this worked rather well, and I really felt at that worship that "something was happening" during it.

To understand all the things happening there we have to understand more of the American/US society. I was there only for ten days and have never been there before, but I had the strong impression that the whole of US society is very 'segmented'. Everybody lives in their own little circles which hardly interact with the other circles in society. For example, also during the conference it was clear that white people do not (really) talk to black people, and the other way round. Everything strange is very scary.

Furthermore I had the impression that US belief can be very strong, but is very self-confident (as are the Americans) and personally and 'Jesus' oriented. Commitment and charity are preached but

still, I think, in an old-fashioned way: We have to help the poor, but the state they are in has not so much to do with the way I'm living.

Conclusion

I'm not finished yet, and I could continue for another page or so, but I have to conclude; time is running short. Some recommendations for further action:

I think it is very important that the ecumenical process in the US can continue. I think WSCF can contribute to this by staying in touch with the students in the US. The channel of the CESCUM seems to be good.

I think the Europe Region can do this by inviting US and Canadian students to the European conferences. It must be possible that finance for this can be arranged in the US by CESCUM. I think it is really important that US students are exposed to the reality (of WSCF). Also the Canadian SCM is small and very isolated. I think connecting to Europe is the best solution as the situation over there and here is in many ways comparable. We deal a lot with the same subjects from

a comparable (western) perspective. At the conference we could notice that the distance between the US and for example the Latin/Caribbean Region is much bigger and I think more difficult to bridge. My suggestion would be to connect the North American Region in some way or another with the Europe Region.

It is clear on the other hand that we, WSCF, have to do something. We need connections with and joint reflection with the students from one of the countries which influence the world so much. And it will take a long time for an ecumenical movement in the US to get itself started. We should reach out to them.

The good things started by the visit of some US students to the Big E I (1989) were noticeable. A significant part of the leadership and organisers of this conference got their first training and their visions there.

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The Who, What and Where of WSCF

If you're having trouble telling your EYCE from your ECCS, or your ERC from your EYC, this brief guide to abbreviations is for you

Amsterdam - Location of WSCF-Europe office

Big E - WSCF-Europe youth festival, Birmingham, England, 1989

Big E II - WSCF-Europe youth festival to be held in the Netherlands, 1993

CEC - Conference of European Churches

ECCS - Ecumenical Commission for Church and Society

ERC - European Regional Committee of WSCF-Europe, made up of 11 representatives from National Movements, each with different functions, meeting about twice a year

EGGYS - Ecumenical Global Gathering of Youth and Students, Brazil, 1993

ExCo - Executive Committee of WSCF, made up of 2 representatives from each Region, meeting once a year

EYC - European Youth Centre, Strasbourg, where many WSCF-Europe conferences are held

EYCE - Ecumenical Youth Council in Europe

Geneva - Location of Inter-Regional office of WSCF

Hirschluch - Location of ERA, 1991 (Germany)

SCM - Student Christian Movement

Strasbourg - Location of EYC

Syndesmos - World Fellowship of Orthodox Youth Organisations

WSCF - World Student Christian Federation

WSCF-Europe - Europe Region of WSCF