

it was a bit of a shock suddenly to be faced with a conference full of grey-suited, middle-aged men. I'd forgotten that this was what the Church was like. I felt very young and very female!

There were almost four men to every woman, and more than 90 over 30s to one under 30.

It might do WSCF well to have conferences like this one - we stayed in a rather nice hotel in the centre of Brussels, we had our meetings in a "proper" conference room with 4 closed booths for the interpreters, rather hi-tech interpretation equipment a comfortable chair and desk for everyone, fully equipped with conference headed notepaper, complimentary pens, caraffes of water and mint chocolates to nibble on when the speakers got boring.

But for all these trimmings, they still managed to be behind time with their mailings - I did not receive the conference material until I got there, and was then left about half an hour to read it before we started discussions! It's as well I'm used to that. However, the rest of the conference seemed

rather more organised and timetables were fairly strictly adhered to.

The opening session, presented by Bob Goudzwaard, who was very interesting, posed a lot of questions about the whole issue of Europe and the European community, and was a promising introduction to the conference, despite some quite heavy and difficult concepts. Unfortunately, there was very little time to ask questions or discuss this until the second part of the next morning, by which time we had already had a "difficult" Bible study and time to be distracted from the impact of the speech. By this time people were more interested in getting into the working groups.

The majority of the rest of the conference was spent in these working groups. I was assigned to the group on "Who decides in Europe?" which really meant "Who does not decide in Europe?" We had two pieces of input to stimulate our discussion. The first was from a European Community lawyer, who made a lot of interesting points about who does and who does not have rights and what should be done to make a more just system, but most of this was

wrapped up in very technical jargon, making it very difficult to concentrate on. Thus the discussion about it became very boring and people showed a general lack of interest. The second input was far more interesting and could have been very stimulating but for the general apathy of the group. I felt that the group was too big for people really to get a discussion going, and this, together with the use of translators and a warm room, caused one or two to nod off. I gather that other working groups were far more animated and interesting, but they were also far smaller.

On one evening we had a round table "animated by theologians". The speakers were very interesting with quite diverse experiences of social issues inside and outside Europe. A very creative and constructive discussion was started and I felt that this was where the conference should have been all along. However, time was running out and we were not allowed to continue. The momentum was lost, no more time was given to this and the conference slipped back into apathy (at least for those who didn't want to decide in Europe!).

Conclusion I came away from the conference feeling quite disconcerted with the churches and with the European Community. I found staying in an expensive hotel and discussing social injustice sickening. In many ways the conference was an excuse for European Ecumenical hacks to meet up with each other again, and for the churches to say "we're discussing the 'Challenges of the European Community'" and then to be able to forget about it.

The conference was good for two things: one was that I learnt quite a lot about the way things work in the European Community - there was a very informative talk given by my own Member of the European Parliament; the other was making contacts and raising the awareness of WSCF with those with financial influence in the churches, ie. the "people that matter".

One other thing, I realised that disorganisation is not only a WSCF or youth speciality!!

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Syndesmos IVth International Orthodox Youth Festival 26 August-1 September 1991: Makri, Alexandroupolis, Greece

"For the Life of the World"

The final act of the Syndesmos Festival will stay with me for a very long time. As we gathered in the small chapel in the monastery of Makri village, Alexandroupolis, for the all night vigil, I knew I was going to be in for a long night. As a Protestant - used more to the sounds of a monotone (male) voice preaching from a pulpit, songs in one

language, usually my mother tongue, and bare walls in the church I was overawed by the smells, music, mystery, symbolism, jewels, chanting, wonder and sheer brilliance of the Orthodox at worship. Luckily I had a copy of the Divine Liturgy in English thrust into my hand: otherwise I would have been completely lost in the utter Babel of languages that was used.

The fact that I was able to follow, and thus participate in the worship so fully meant that the pain of being separated by the Eucharist at the end was all the more poignant. We were separated by history, tradition, dogmas, schisms and linguistic interpretations. These human elements divided us, and caused pain. Yet I believe that the Divine elements pre-

sent with us all in that worship, the elements of love, struggle, justice, patience, honesty and care are the elements that must sustain and nourish us, when we are unable to share the nourishment of the Lord's Supper, as we search for ways forward in our ecumenical debate. The Festival was more, however, than one all-night vigil.

Here are some stories to give some flavour of what it meant to be a festiveller.

Lost in Greece

Before I arrived at the Festival site (5km outside Alexandroupolis, which is in the north-eastern state of Evrou, 34km from the border with Turkey) I was to have an adventure. We were to meet in the centre of Alexandroupolis at 14.00pm on the Monday, so when I landed in the city airport at 8.00am I decided that the first thing to do to kill some time would be to walk in to the city centre. Little did I know that the town I saw nearby was not Alexandroupolis, which in fact was a good 8km farther on, but was a little-known suburban village. After two or three false starts, a good hour of walking about looking for buses, and at least 16 cat-calls from passing motorists, I eventually came across a lady who looked as though she was waiting for a bus, and who spoke good German. While we waited together, she explained that although her family came from this small village, and although she had been born and brought up here, she did not feel that she fitted to the Greek culture because she had spent most of her adult life living and working in Germany. She had moved to Germany because of the lack of jobs and food in Evrou, and came back only for extended holidays. In that country, however, she did not fit either because to the Germans she was Greek. A living example of displaced cultures and nationals finding no real home in a multi-cultural Europe. She managed to direct me to the city though, so I was glad she was there and not in Germany!

Whose Tradition Anyway?

One thing that I learned quickly from most of the

Orthodox I met was that for them tradition is a very important word. One evening, as I was sitting outside the office, trying yet again to call the WSCF European Regional Assembly in Hirschluch (!) I began chatting with a young Orthodox theologian from Greece. We all had badges on giving our names, our country, and any particular designation. Mine had WSCF on it, but in the dark he could not see that

and assumed that I was one of the rare breed of Orthodox from Scotland. When he asked me what I was doing, and I replied

that I was going to begin studying theology in Edinburgh, he then wanted to know what kind of theology I would be taught. Explaining that I came from a country where the state religion was reformed Christianity, he warned me very strongly against any form of Protestant Theology. When I ventured to enquire why I should be so wary, he explained that Protestantism "had no tradition". I then felt that it was time to blow my cover - I think he was grateful for the darkness to hide his embarrassment! I tried to explain a bit about the Celtic Church, 6th Century Christianity coming to Scotland from Ireland, St. Augustine, St. Martin, the growing traditions of Anglicanism and Protestantism, and the fact that culture, history, society and language all go into creating culture-specific manifestations of the same God-worship in which we all participate. Perhaps I totally misunderstood what "tradition" means for Orthodox. And perhaps on further research I may discover that



Protestantism has none of the kind of "tradition" that my Greek friend was alluding to. Or perhaps we simply have a different understanding of the word. Whatever it is, one sure way to overcome stereotypes is to throw yourself into a conversation where you let your prejudices be known.

Oriental/Eastern

While we are on the subject of differences in interpretation, a word about the

layers of meaning of "ecumenism" in Orthodoxy. There has been an on-going dialogue/battle since 451 AD and the

Ecumenical Council of Chalcedon between those who believed in the one, divine nature of Jesus Christ (the Monophysites) who have come to be known as Oriental Orthodox, and those who believed in the dual (human and divine) nature of Jesus Christ, who are now known as the Eastern Orthodox. Two distinguished speakers (Father K M George from India and Father Heikki Huttunen from Finland) addressed us on this issue, and it became a recurring theme in many of the debates and discussion groups. While this striving for unity (the two are coming together now after 1500 years of separation) within one denomination is essential, there was a certain amount of frustration felt amongst some of the ecumenical (CEC, WSCF, Focolare) delegates that we must address the issue of ecumenism on the wider all-embracing front as well. Many of the Orthodox delegates with whom I spoke shared this frustration, and realised the need for on-going debate

and dialogue with Christians from other denominations. Some delegates felt that there was no point in making wider ecumenical attempts while there was still schism within one denomination. In the "Relationships" Working Group which met on each day of the Assembly for about one hour, we talked about the challenges posed by a wider ecumenism which even demands that we look at issues of inter-faith dialogue. As in any gathering of 150 people there was a wide cross-section of views on almost every issue. It was encouraging however to meet some young Orthodox who were willing both to share the riches of their tradition and to rejoice with those of us from other traditions who share different histories but the same faith.

The Eastern Question

On the Thursday of the Conference Metropolitan David of Moldavia and Bukovina, Romania, spoke to the Conference about the situation as he perceived it of the church/state relationships in East Europe. He made a perceptive and interesting speech, talking first about the challenge of pluralism in the context of persecution and freedom. The church in most eastern countries during the time of Communism was the only organ of the nation which proclaimed the existence of God. As such, its role was a precarious one, made all the more precarious by the recent events where the "truth" of the state (communism) has been undermined, yet the truth of the Church must be proclaimed more fully than ever. Secondly, he talked about the challenge of proselytism which comes with the freedom of state power. Churches are now freer to preach and challenge, but this means that they are also more open to being challenged and

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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Council for Ecumenical Student Christian Ministry 28 December 1990-1 January 1991: Louisville, Kentucky, USA

"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,