

Report on a conference at Redcliffe College
Centre for Mission Training
3-4 January 2008
Dorothy Knights

The Europe Mission Forum has been following the three-year Mission Research of Darrell Jackson based in Budapest. He was sponsored by the Conference of European Churches and Church Mission Society. He has now moved to the above college in Gloucester where, as a continuity of that work, he directs the Nova Research Centre. Nova was officially launched with a dinner on Thursday evening.

I was very pleased to represent CTBI at this event. Many of the forty participants had met Darrell a year ago when the first Conference for the Future of Mission in Europe was held at Redcliffe. They all came from Evangelical backgrounds, a new experience for me, but I felt comfortable thanks to Darrell's initial lecture - 'Evangelical and Ecumenical Missiology in Post-Communist Europe' - which was accompanied by a helpful chart. All Ecumenical references were familiar to me and it was very good to see there were more convergences than divergences.

I was surprised at first that hardly anyone, except the CMS delegates, knew what CTBI stood for, but when they were told they without fail said it was 'a good thing' and that churches should come together.

Likewise I didn't recognise many of the other organisations represented. I wasn't surprised that less than a quarter of us were women; in fact only three women had come as individuals.

The College was welcoming and I even felt, in her absence, the care of Amanda whose room I occupied.

Marsh Moyle has worked in Central Europe for over 30 years. He is now at CityGates in Bratislava and gave us a presentation 'Lessons for the Churches

of Europe after 15 years of post-Communist experience in Central and Eastern Europe'.

There were delegates from other European countries. Giovanni and Hannah are married students from Sicily who plan to return to work there. Italian Evangelicals have been persecuted in the past, and mutual suspicion between Roman Catholics and Evangelicals must be overcome. Rita is from Lithuania and is the first Nova intern. She is excited to have been recognised as a possible speaker in her own country. Raymond Pfister, with a background of French Pentecostalism, is principal of Birmingham Christian College. Kjetil Aano came from Norway. Their conversations reflected the diversity of Christian experience in Europe.

Some organisations had been working in Asia or Africa and decided to focus on Europe. There seemed to be an understanding of new challenges and a readiness for us all to learn within the varying cultures of Europe. There was a general willingness to look to the past, the present and the future. Development of interfaith dialogue was recognised. We heard a few stories of migrant churches and it was good to know that one of Nova's first research projects will be with the Churches' Commission for Migrants in Europe, in Brussels.

I joined a group discussing the training of lay leaders in rural areas of Eastern Europe. It was led by Brian Pile from Breadline who visits Moldova. I hope to visit Moldova in March with the Coordinating Group of Ecumenical Forum of European Christian Women. Our conversation reflected the interests of the eight participants and whether there was a blueprint for our idea of Church. I learnt something about Cell Churches. Half our group agreed they were bored by Church and didn't want to repeat UK models in another place. I could have said I was bored by their emphasis that they were only concerned with converting young Christians. However it was helpful when a Presbyterian minister from Ireland suggested Andrew, the disciple, might be a good model. It's hard to believe there are still parts of Europe where Christians are not encouraged to read the Bible for themselves. As a complete contrast we

heard about rural communities in India spreading the gospel through individuals telling stories.

The last talk was from Richard Tiplady who listed a large number of books which had helped him to research Emerging Mission Forms. He is the British Director of European Christian Mission. He talked about NW Europe with ideas based on four areas of Sociology, Missiology, Theology and Ecclesiology. The first area was about considering not being meeting-focussed. He is a good speaker, listening also to what others had to say. Darrell concluded by telling us two transformative stories. The first was about a Russian Orthodox worship in a packed church outside Moscow led by a priest who had struggled to be recognised. There were two new experiences for his congregation. They shared the peace and they said the Lord's Prayer. The second was the story of a Mennonite congregation in the Netherlands who in setting up a furniture building project discovered the person they asked to help already knew the small Roman Catholic Community in Africa. Both were transformative experiences.

The last item of the day was labelled Global Connections Europe Forum. Brian Knell told us that at the moment no European Forum met! Had we any suggestions about what they might do? Would we like to observe a Europe Day? I mentioned that 9 May was already recognised as Europe Day and that Faith in Europe might have more information on its website.

It's been interesting to catch up with information about the delegates via their websites. I also have a DVD about Nova from Darrell and from Kairos a DVD "Why Europe? Why Now?".

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