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EurECA Conference 2007

A Christian Vision for Education in 21st Century Europe

Vevey, Switzerland

It was Ascension Day as we gathered together at Emmaus Bible Institute in its beautiful location on a hillside above Lake Geneva. From all across Europe (and even as far away as Singapore!) we came, 70 of us from 16 countries (7 from Austria, 2 from Bulgaria, 1 from Denmark, 10 from England, 2 from Finland, 3 from France, 12 from Germany, 2 from Italy, 3 from Latvia, 3 from Norway, 3 from Poland, 1 from Portugal, 10 from Romania, 2 from Scotland, 1 from Singapore and 8 from Switzerland). We came from a wide range of spheres of involvement in education: from primary and secondary schools (both state and independent), language schools, colleges and universities and a number of us were representing national Christian teacher associations and other organisations supporting Christians in school and home education.

This year's conference marked the 10th anniversary of the Prague Declaration which was agreed at a working conference near Prague in 1997. (The Prague Declaration is now available in ten languages – [Czech](#), [English](#), [French](#), [German](#), [Hungarian](#), [Polish](#), [Portuguese](#), [Romanian](#), [Russian](#) and [Spanish](#).) The theme of our conference this year was 'A Christian Vision for Education in 21st Century Europe'. In the plenary sessions (ably and inspiringly led by Rudolph Westerheide, Director of Christian Endeavour in Germany, and Gordon Showell-Rogers, General Secretary of the European Evangelical Alliance) and in our working groups, worship and prayer times and informal time together, our concern was to look back (to what was stated in the Prague Declaration and how it may need restating ten years on), look out (at the Europe in which children and young people are growing up today), look forward (to the challenges and opportunities facing us as Christian educators) and look up (to the Lord whom we seek to serve in education as we worshipped, prayed and listened for his word together).

Edited texts (in English) of the plenary presentations by Rudolf ([Christian Beliefs of Particular Relevance for Education in Contemporary Europe](#)) and Gordon ([The Context of Contemporary Education in Europe](#)) are available if you click on their titles. You can also find the text of an introductory presentation by John Shortt ([The Story of the 1997 Prague Declaration ... and some personal reflections](#)) by clicking on its title.

It is always good to have people at our conference for the first time and this year was no exception. Sally Smith, one of our first-timers, shares her impressions with us:

"I had many expectations as I travelled to Switzerland for the 2007 EurECA conference. From people I knew who had been before I knew it would be fun, and that there would be interesting people to meet from different countries and with different educational experiences, and that we would all be there because of our shared love of God and of children. There would be good teaching which would inform and inspire my work in the coming year. I also knew that there would be people there who knew each other well, and as a newcomer I was anxious that I might find it hard to fit in and make friends, but I need not have worried. After meeting a colleague at Geneva airport, we met three other conference participants at the airport rail station and so began the conversations which were to continue for the next few days. At Vevey station the excitement mounted, and I began to feel part of something much bigger. There were many clear EurECA Conference signs showing us the way onward, and again more people to meet as we waited for the local train that took us the final leg of the journey, and a warm welcome from Rosemarie giving us a lift in her car to our final destination, and the first of many very tasty meals.

In the first main session, Rudolph Westerheide reminded us of Luther's four 'onlys' - only faith, only scripture, only Christ and only grace - and challenged us to apply these to our discipleship in our work among children and young people. In the second main session, Gordon Showell-Rogers invited us to consider the context in which we live in the 21st century and the impact this has on our work with youngsters. After each session we met in small groups to discuss the implications of what we had heard in our own countries and situations. It was interesting to hear the similarities and differences across countries.

There were opportunities for conference participants to tell the whole conference something about life in their countries and the prayer needs of both their countries and their particular situations. On the final evening, we had an extended prayer session which was led very imaginatively and gave us opportunity to pray with different people for different aspects of education in Europe. As in the worship sessions, prayer was in people's own languages and in English. Singing in German, French and English made me consider the key words and ideas expressed in the songs, and I appreciated throughout the conference everyone's willingness to use English.

Friday afternoon was an afternoon of excursions, with the choice of a trip on the lake, a visit to a local town, or a train ride and mountain walk. A good time was had by all, and there was much chat and making of new friends, as well as seeing more of the beautiful surroundings we were staying in.

I was reluctant to leave the beautiful scenery and the new friends I had made, but I hope to meet up with many of them again at future EurECA conferences."

Our thanks to Sally for sharing her impressions. Another first-time participant sent an email when she got back home in which she wrote, "... a wonderful conference. I am aware that the setting made it very special but I would still love to come on others in the future. They are amazing events." And a regular participant also wrote, "Please convey my sincere thanks to the EurECA Board for working to organise such a great conference. ... the location was spectacular, the international fellowship superb and the ministry both challenging and uplifting ... an excellent weekend that could have fruitfully lasted many more days!"