

Agreement for EBF and CPCE to become mutually Co-operating bodies

PREAMBLE

I. The Situation

1. The European Baptist Federation (EBF), currently comprising 51 Baptist unions in Europe and the Middle and Near East, is an umbrella organisation which serves to strengthen and inspire their constituency in witness and shared responsibility. The Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) connects 105 Lutheran, Reformed, United and Methodist churches in Europe and South America that strive for realising church fellowship on the basis of the Leuenberg Agreement (LA) of 1973, especially by the fullest possible cooperation in witness and service to the world.
2. After a number of conversations, EBF and CPCE in 2004 published the document *The Beginning of the Christian Life and the Nature of the Church*. It identified a wide range of common convictions between Baptist and CPCE churches. Above all, it became clear that the Baptists share in the common understanding of the gospel, as expressed in LA 7-12. It was even possible to arrive at consensus about important themes regarding the understanding and practice of baptism (although this consensus is not complete).
3. The document resulted in the joint recommendation “to strive for the closest possible community in witness and service” and “to work together in every responsible way to fulfil our missionary calling”. This recommendation was taken up by the CPCE General Assembly 2006 which received the results of the dialogue with gratitude. It instructed the Council to evaluate the positions of member churches and against this background to prepare proposals for closer co-operation and encouraged the member churches, at local and national levels, to carry on or intensify the dialogue with the Baptists. Also the relevant EBF bodies welcomed the document. The EBF Executive Committee at its meeting in April 2004 expressed its wish “to continue the good relations with CPCE and to cooperate in areas which help our mutual concern to further God’s mission in contemporary Europe”. The wish for cooperation was confirmed by the EBF Council in September 2004.
4. In many countries there are good formal and informal relations between CPCE churches and Baptist Unions. There is even a declaration of church fellowship between the Waldensian and Methodist Church and the Baptist Union in **Italy**. Others formal initiatives include (the list is not exhaustive):

Sweden Many united local churches with Methodists and Mission Covenant churches. Current preparations for a full United Church formed from the three denominations.

- Ongoing bilateral dialogue between the Baptist Union of Sweden and the Church of Sweden (Lutheran)
- England** Many Local Ecumenical Partnerships (LEPs) with Methodist and United Reformed Churches over the past 40 years
Longstanding agreements on baptismal policy in LEPs with both these churches
A joint Baptist/Methodist/United Reformed Public Issues Team (JPIT) speaks on behalf of all three churches
- Austria** Dialogue between the Baptist Union and the Lutheran, Reformed and Methodist Church 2004-2007, ending with a communiqué
- Norway** Bilateral dialogue between The Church of Norway and the Baptist Union of Norway, 1989
Bilateral conversations between the United Methodist Church in Norway and The Baptist Union of Norway 2004
- France** Dialogue 'The Scriptures, the Church and Baptism', between the *Conseil Permanent Luthéro Réformé* (CPLR, Permanent Lutheran-Reformed Council and the *Fédération des Eglises Evangéliques Baptistes de France* (FEEBF, French Federation of Evangelical Baptist Churches) 2001-2007
- Bavaria** Bavarian Lutheran-Baptist Working Group (BALUBAG), resulting in a Convergence Document: Learning from one another – believing together (2009)
- Czech Republic** Invitation to the Czech Baptist Union from a Czech Lutheran denomination to a Dialogue based on the Bavarian document (2010)

It should be noted that almost all the above initiatives have not had the official involvement of CPCE though some of them have found the results of the CPCE/EBF dialogue helpful in their discussions.

II. Principles of the Agreement from the Perspective of CPCE

5. The proposed agreement builds on the presupposition that a declaration of church fellowship (in the understanding of the Leuenberg Agreement) is not yet possible. The document of 2004 did not reach a full agreement in the right administration of the sacraments (although possible ways were discussed).
6. Nevertheless, the CPCE churches have – with the recognition of a common understanding of the Gospel – in fact recognised the Church of Jesus Christ in the Baptist churches. According to its conception of church unity, this recognition leads to “desire further committed dialogue” in order to make church fellowship possible (cf. The Church of Jesus Christ, III.1.4).
7. Also practical reasons speak for an intensification of the cooperation with EBF. Besides the wish to support the relations of the CPCE member churches with their Baptist counterparts in various countries (especially where the relations are charged by the burden of history or by a mutual mistrust), the field of politics and society is especially important. The CPCE General Assembly in Belfast 2001

decided “to bring Protestant voices together on fundamental questions, and to allow them to speak and be heard in the European public arena” and thus “to give a clear Protestant witness on important current questions of politics, society and ecumenical matters”. This work is done by public statements of the CPCE Council or presidium, mostly prepared by the Expert Group on ethics. With claiming to express this “Protestant voice in Europe”, the CPCE took responsibility for enabling other churches that understand themselves as Protestant to participate in that task.

III. Principles of the Agreement from the Perspective of EBF

8. The Baptist churches do not feel bound by the “Leuenberg” model of church fellowship. They can recognise the fruits of the Spirit in other Christian churches and, on the basis of the shared understanding of the Gospel, seek to realise Christian ‘koinonia’ and cooperation in practical matters. Accepting the CPCE view that church fellowship is not yet possible, they are nevertheless interested in expressing the theological convergence achieved so far by means of a formal Agreement. This is done especially with a view to those EBF member Unions that feel it important to have good and equal relations with the ‘mainstream’ Protestants in their countries and to engage in common witness wherever possible.
9. As the European Baptists consider themselves as part of the European Reformation family, they request that the ‘Protestant Voice for Europe’ represented by CPCE also articulates the concerns of the significant minority group of Baptist churches in Europe, including the churches belonging to Unions in membership with the EBF.

IV. Shared Principles of the Agreement

10. Building on these considerations, EBF and CPCE conclude the following agreement that respects the different characters and convictions of the partners and ensures complete mutuality between them. It aims at allowing progress in the relationship up to the highest possible degree of cooperation, especially regarding joint witness and service to the world, and opening a continuation of the theological dialogue, especially about baptism and its practice.

AGREEMENT

V. Joint Obligations

11. EBF and CPCE commit themselves to invite each other to the annual meetings of the EBF Council and the CPCE General Assemblies (taking place every six years).
12. They commit themselves to arrange regular meetings of the General Secretaries and other officers.
13. They agree on continuing the mutual exchange of press releases and information material.
14. They express their readiness to arrange joint consultations on matters of mutual concern.
15. They express their readiness to take up the theological dialogue, as soon as new perspectives have emerged from regional dialogues between CPCE churches and EBF member unions.

VI. Obligations for CPCE

16. CPCE commits itself to involve the EBF as far as possible in its activities. The following elements of this involvement are agreed:
 - a. CPCE will invite EBF to delegate participant observers to its doctrinal conversations, fully engaged in discussion, but without the right to vote in the final decision.
 - b. CPCE will consider inviting EBF to delegate participant observers to other consultations, as far as matters of mutual interest are concerned.
 - c. CPCE will strongly encourage its (self-regulating) regional groups to invite Baptist unions from their regions as participant observers, working for reconciliation and co-operation at intermediate level.
 - d. CPCE will co-opt a Baptist consultant to its expert group on ethics, thus ensuring a Baptist contribution to formulating and expressing the “Protestant voice in Europe”.
 - e. CPCE will invite a Baptist participant (via EBF) to the “Evangelischer Arbeitskreis für Konfessionskunde in Europe” (Working Group for Confessional Issues in Europe).
 - f. CPCE will consider inviting Baptist observers in its interconfessional dialogues (with Orthodox, Anglicans etc.).
 - g. CPCE will encourage its Lutheran and United member churches to reconsider the condemnations in the Confessio Augustana that may be regarded as applying to Baptists. It will recommend a consideration of the suggestions made in the communiqué of the talks between the Austrian Baptist union and the CPCE churches in Austria in 2007.

VII. Obligations for EBF

17. EBF commits itself to involve CPCE as far as possible in its activities. The following elements of this involvement are agreed:
 - a. EBF will invite a CPCE participant to the annual Mission Conference, held each year in June.
 - b. EBF will consider inviting CPCE participants to specific Consultations, especially those organised by the EBF Division of External Relations, and the Division of Theology and Education.
 - c. EBF will support CPCE in defending the religious freedom of minority churches in Europe, including Baptist churches (for CPCE this is normally done through the Conference of European Churches).
 - d. EBF will encourage its members unions to engage in dialogue and joint activities with CPCE churches in their counties wherever possible.