

## Successful Outcome of EBF/CPCE Talks

### Third meeting in Prague concludes with final agreed statement

[Picture with caption of co-chairmen]

Representatives of the Community of Protestant Churches in Europe (CPCE) and of the European Baptist Federation (EBF) held a meeting at the International Baptist Theological Seminary in Prague hosted by the EBF. This was the third and final meeting in a round of talks that started in 2002 and which is hoped will lead to deeper community between the Lutheran, Reformed, United and Methodist churches and the Baptist unions in Europe. Once again the talks were conducted in a spirit of friendship and co-operation which reflected the atmosphere of trust between the participants.

Discussions took place on prepared papers which summarised a theological consensus in the understanding of 'gospel, faith and Church', and also highlighted points of agreement concerning baptism. For example it could be stated: "In baptism into the name of the triune God, the Christian church celebrates the victory of the love of God over human godlessness and over all the powers of evil ... Baptism is therefore also a place where human beings can say a 'yes' of faith to the God who has already said yes to them in the victory of love."

There remain differences in the administration of baptism which require further exploration. Despite this, there is full encouragement to welcome one another to the celebration of the Lord's Supper and to experience practical acceptance of each other's ministries.

A final document, *'The Beginning of the Christian Life and the Nature of the Church'* was agreed unanimously at the conclusion of the meeting. This will now be presented to the Executive Committees of the EBF and CPCE (formerly the Leuenberg Church Fellowship), for onward transmission to their member Churches and Unions. The document brings both encouragement and some challenging questions to the churches of the EBF and CPCE concerning their baptismal practice, moving towards deeper relationships within the Protestant churches in Europe.

At the end of the meeting the chairman of the EBF delegation, Dr Theo Angelov, stated: "The talks between CPCE and EBF are marking an important step in building further co-operation among the Protestant communities on our continent." The chairman of the CPCE delegation, Bishop Dr Martin Hein, was convinced that "this document really brings new aspects in the disputed issue of baptism. I hope that it will put the relationships between Baptist unions and Protestant churches on a new basis in many European countries."

The participants of the EBF side were: General Secretary Dr Theodor Angelov (Sofia/ chairman), Prof. Paul Fiddes (Oxford), Rector Keith Jones (Prague), Prof. Johnny Jonsson (Stockholm), Prof. Tony Peck (Bristol), Prof. Wiard Popkes (Lüneburg/ Germany), Dr Sergei Sannikov (Odessa), Dr Kim Strübind (Munich) and Dr Emanuel Wieser (Vienna).

The participants of the CPCE side were: The Right Reverend Dr Martin Hein (Kassel/ chairman), Prof. André Birmelé (Strasbourg), Prof. Fulvio Ferrario (Rome), Prof.

Martin Friedrich (Berlin), Dr Wilhelm Hüffmeier (Berlin), Prof. Tamás Juhász (Cluj/Romania), Rev. Dr Miloš Klátik (Bratislava), Dr Manfred Marquardt (Reutlingen/Germany) and Prof. John Cecil McCullough (Belfast). Bishop Dr Ernst Baasland (Stavanger) and Prof. Eberhard Jüngel (Tübingen), who had participated in drafting the document, were prevented from attending the final meeting.