

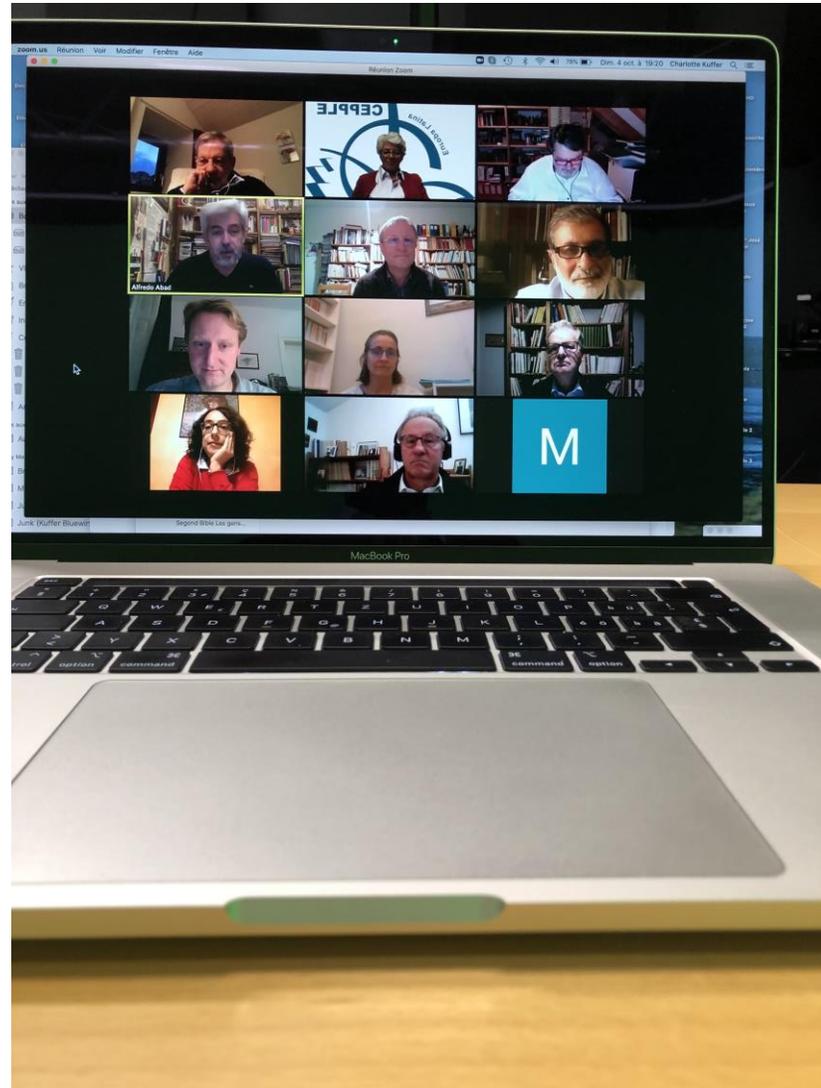


Conference call on October 5, 2020

« Borders that are recomposed, theologies in tension,
remain together living Protestant Churches in Southern Europe »

With the participation of the
Professor emeritus in practical theology of the faculties of French-speaking
Switzerland, Félix Moser

CONFÉRENCE DES ÉGLISES PROTESTANTES DES PAYS LATINS D'EUROPE (CEPPLA)



CEPPLE - Videoconférence 5 octobre 2020

Participants :

Belgique	Eglise Protestante Unie de Belgique	Past FUITE	Steven	Président EPUB
		DEHOUSSE	Ferdinand	Participant
		Past LOUCK-TALOM	Jean Lesort	Délégué EC
Espagne	Iglesia Evangelica Espanola	Past GIL MILIAN	Augusto	Délégué EC
		Past ABAD	Alfredo	Président CEPPL
France	Eglise Prot Unie de France	Past SIXT GATEUILLE	Claire	Relations Eglises EPUdF
		Past MOUYON	Emmanuelle	Déléguée EC
	UNEPREF	Past STAUFFACHER Excusé	John-Raymond	Président UNEPREF
	Fédération Baptiste		0	
	Fédération baptiste	Past LEIBE	Jean-Luc	Membre Bureau CEPPL
Italie	Chiesa Evangelica Valdese	BARAL	Sabina	Déléguée EC
Portugal	Igreja Evangelica Presbiteriana	Past PEREIRA	Joao	Délégué EC
Suisse	Eglise Reformée Fribourg EREF	JOHNER Excusée	Monique	Déléguée EC
	Eglise Protestante Geneve EPG	Past stagiaire LANDEAU	Sandrine	Participante
Eglise Reformée du Valais EREV	Eglise Reformée du Valais EREV	Past CAVIN Excusé	Gilles	Président EREV
	Eglise Reformée de Vaud EERV	Past LIPP	Jean-Baptiste	Président CER conf Egl ron
CEPE	Communion Eglise prot Europe	Ph.D. ENGELHARDT	Oliver	Relation Eglises CEPE
Intervenant au colloque		Professeur MOSER	Félix	
Secrétaire générale CEPP		KUFFER	Charlotte	
Trésorier CEPPL		GUY	Joël	
Nombre de participants			18	
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Reminder

On 5 October 2020, a conference by videoconference brought together 18 representatives of the member churches of the CEPPLE Regional Group. Stemming from the preoccupations prioritized at the CEPPLE General Assembly in Lisbon in 2018, the theme chosen was «Borders that recompose, theologies in tension, remain together Protestant Churches living in the south of Europe». This symposium should contribute to a key issue of our CEPPLE 2018-2022 legislature:

How do we plan together a Latin Protestant specificity?

This with the conviction that a minority can have an impact, a living communion can make reference, the strength of a shared action, a common witness relayed by coordinated Church media can strengthen our visibility. The Professor emeritus in practical theology of the French faculties, Félix Moser, made his contribution to this conference 2020 where the CEPPLE Churches of French language (Belgium, France, French-speaking Switzerland) were invited to join the delegates to the Continuation Team.

A second symposium will bring together in 2021 the Churches of Portugal, Spain and Italy with the Continuation Team for the same reflection. The synthesis will take place at the CEPPLE General Assembly in Palermo in 2022.

We have determined two dimensions of the reality of the Latin Protestant Churches to be deepened: Trans-Territoriality and Trans-Ecclesiality

We call Trans-territoriality

« The contemporary modification of the perception and use of borders (cultural, ecclesial ...) »

To stand together as Protestants is a necessity to be in a position to carry the Gospel in southern Europe. The linguistic and cultural «borders» disappear in the daily reality of our contemporaries.

Our condition as Latin countries, in notable diaspora situation compared to other regional groups of the Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe (CEPE), is an identity that binds us beyond borders.

We call Trans-Ecclesiality

«The articulation of different theological conceptions in Church decisions»

In their theological diversity (ecclesiology, ethics, hermeneutics), the member churches of the CEPPLÉ embody together a Protestant presence in southern Europe.

We support this capacity for dialogue, sharing, solidarity in our diversity and unity.

The Communion of Protestant Churches in Europe CEPE, of which we are the regional group of the South, contributes to this unity.

Introduction to the theme by Professor Félix Moser

What does our theme inspire him?

Introductory Plan – see full video presentation at <https://www.cepple.eu>

I - What are we talking about? Vocabulary clarifications

- Borders and conventions
- Words and representations
- Beliefs, values and convictions

II - The common quest for truth beyond relativism and dogmatism

- Moving beyond relativism to an ethics of consideration
- A primary grace that engages the human being, the call and the response
- Bonhoeffer grace is a gift, you must open the gift. Sola gratia - sola fide

Churches share about Trans-territoriality

How do territorial changes manifest themselves in our Churches

What are the implications of these trans-territorialities?

Speaking to the participants

EPUdF

- Administrative borders are persistent. Institutional logics are factors blocking institutional habits
- In some church unions words and languages can create borders (Canaan dialect)
- COVID Containment reinforces the notion of network, but it reinforces the logic of the same. Some networks instigate separatism.

EPUB

- EPUB is a collection coloured by diversity. Full of contrasts. A mosaic Church. Belgium has not been communitarized. Federalism helps by delegation of competence to the regions. Belgium is a fragmented country in different aspects.
- Presence of groups that think differently is experienced as a valve, not as a border. From the outside, everything seems to be fine. The compromises are active, this makes the synodal decisions functional. Issues of personal ethics (sometimes among newcomers, ethnic diversity) block in some places.
- Multi-culturality is to work in the Church (like feeling of discrimination, racism). Theology is contextual, it must take into account the world of tomorrow in its universal dimension. The presence of African and ethnic Churches raises questions about the cultural and ecclesiological dimension. To simplify, there may be a trend towards a form of “Brexit”.
- EPUB question : can we overcome the differences and adopt the union or are we moving towards separatist tendencies?
- The EPUB Mosaic Church has a stake in dealing with multiculturalism. Questioning from the ground up on living together.
- There are fundamentalisms. Relations between EPUB and the Evangelical Churches are relatively difficult. There is a fragmentation of the Christian faith which sometimes weakens Protestantism in the eyes of the State.

Conférence des Eglises Romandes CER et Eglises cantonales romandes

- Evolution in Switzerland towards a Reformed Evangelical Church in Switzerland EERS formerly Federation of Churches FEPS - Improved visibility expected in society - Reformed DNA resists centralism.
- CER in charge of the training of pastors and deacons and the media (print media, radio, TV, social networks) - mutualisation and control - COVID boosts networking – Visibility of territories, e.g. National TV which wishes “Happy Easter” to Catholics only! – Work to commemorate the Protestantism that shaped the country – the Romand territory around the DM Mission Department, Service des Eglises protestantes romandes for mission projects, training and community development in partnership with Churches of the South (South Africa, Angola, Benin, Cameroon, Congo DR, Madagascar, Mauritius, Mozambique, Rwanda, Togo, Egypt, Cuba, Mexico). The CER federates action but has no operational burden.
- Reformed Evangelical Church of the Canton of Vaud EERV – big work of revisiting pluralism, collective work around a Creed; currently, some texts of cohesion have emerged - visibility of Protestantism around the defense of creation and also families; Some believe that we risk thematic communitarianism. Questioning around fresh expressions. Ecumenical platform (Catholics and Protestants) out of breath.
- Trust people who are not mainstream so that they can bring their ability from a different perspective and that promotes contact with margins.
- The Protestant Church of Geneva EPG lives well the diversity, but suffers from the new territorial distribution (regionalization); currently, there are tax complications on religious buildings with the State (tax reduction at the risk of changing territories). But there is a common vision in the Church.

Summary by Félix Moser

on the experiences of the Churches on the matter of Territoriality

- How to articulate **worship and culture** – how to articulate our expressions of faith, our desire to hear the Gospel together and to share bread and wine, how to celebrate together?
- **Unity and diversity**: 2 notions to be deepened – Unity is not an ecumenism of politeness, but a true encounter. See O. Cullmann: unity through diversity – how can I receive from others that broaden the common corpus, the common platform?
- **Writing and interpretation**: We are bound by our desire to share the texts. Setting up reading criteria and explaining them. Going beyond the processes of intention (fundamentalism/relativism) – For F Moser, his canon of interpretation would be that of justification by grace. In the criteria of interpretation, community reading and discernment are essential, I cannot be right alone.
- **Question of territories** (politics in the organization of institutions and religious) - What mutualization (reciprocity) beyond our territories – a force to learn our differences. Formerly in Switzerland, there was an entanglement of the Churches and the State; today a trans cantonal work is undertaken with a view to mutualisation. The logic of hospitality is not driven by fear of loss, but by enrichment. From hostis /enemy to hospes / hospitality. Conversion work.
- At the ecumenical Catholic/Protestant level, despite the withdrawal of common institutions, how to get out of a tense Protestant identity.

What we remember about trans-territoriality (1)

- Risk of separatism about worship and culture. EPUB, it would be a theme to take up for itself by the CEPPLÉ.
- Italy: The question of cults and cultures is important - If we need to reaffirm a church that is a testimony and not an identity, we also need to hear the reality of society with the mixing of ideas. So, is the reference to J.C. still central today? Thus, there is a tension between preaching and diaconia.
Spain: We note, that there are theological differences that are growing, because dialogue no longer exists in certain situations. We need to find a new paradigm about dialogue, the cultural and historical burden that we are not yet there.
- Portugal: What is being said here today is happening in Portugal. History and culture prevent progress on current issues: inter-religious dialogue, ecumenism, marriage for all...
- France: the management of pluralism at all levels in the EPUDF, so that the regions are not refuges. How can we be benevolent without being angelic in a constructive dialogue?
- Belgium: There are many multi-cultural and ecclesial issues within the ethnic Church. The different ways of living the worship, the offering.

- What we remember about trans-territoriality (2)

- Latin identity - not being an identity Church but testifying – working on words, for example, the word “God” that young people refer to fundamentalism – the discourse on God is difficult today – we have a chance to rediscover the centrality of the figure of Christ – return to seeking God through JC - Be careful not to drift on an ease of being identified about diaconal actions only.
- The word testifying (Church of witnesses): not to be deprived of words that make sense to us, by others who use the notions to divide. But we can assume it as a link and not as a repellent (them and us). Angler the attestation not to take public opinion head-on in its preconceived representations.
- We need renovated paradigms to get out of the crunch. COVID does not produce antibodies in children! By analogy, how to hang on to families and contemporaries who reject the God of institutions – emotional exchange, immediate to connect in networks.
- Do not be afraid of the words we use, assume that we have turned away from the path and know how to return to the junction, accept not to be infallible, assume our history.
- Ecumenism is sometimes at a standstill in connection with aggiornamento about sexual abuse and tensions between types of communities. Protestants also have a problem with their attitude.
- Public testimony of the Churches and vocabulary for conversation. Work on grammar (remember the way missionaries: learn the local language, translate the Bible).
- Review the axes and articulate them cult and culture/ Unity and diversity/ Change of territories and mutualisation

Churches share about Trans-ecclesiality (1)

«The articulation of different theological conceptions in Church decisions»

What elements of “good practices” can you propose that contribute to unity in the necessary trans-ecclesialities?

Speaking to the participants

- Formation, catechesis, how to deepen and continue the mutualisation at the international level of the Churches - for example, ongoing reflection by the Point KT Platform “Francophone Catechesis Platform” <https://www.pointkt.org> and its access to families
- EERV “Toolbox” resource <https://eerv.ch/pluralisme/> (documents on pluralism) – encouragement to exploit it internationally
- Intra-ecclesial tensions after a controversial synodal decision – Finding that water ends up “flowing under the bridge”
- “Rendez-vous de la pensée protestante” <https://les-rendez-vous.fr/index.php/blog/> - 21.01.2019 meeting “L'autorité des Ecritures pour aujourd'hui – Enjeux et perspectives.” - Blog <https://www.reformes.ch/blog/sandrine-landeau/2020/08/discuter-sans-chercher-convaincre> : apprendre à mieux se connaître et apprendre à dialoguer – EPG Compagnie des Pasteurs et des diacres takes up the approach around “rituality” – Don’t pretend that everything is fine, but open the dialogue on diversity (SL recounts the testimony of an African pastor in training, who invites us to take a look at our practices, interesting reflection)

Churches share about Trans-ecclesiality (2)

- Management of pluralism: the challenge of maintaining pluralism at all levels, the temptation for some pastors to favour a post in a region that resembles them theologically. In the distribution of ministerial positions, in HR management, ensure the balance of plurality – ensure that pluralism is maintained at all levels in the Church
- Caring more than control is a challenge. How to make room for those who carry a voice that is not mainstream and that can foster dialogue with margins
- COVID has smoothed tensions and facilitated collaborations
- Observation that when more than 40% of a community has an "ethnic" identity (e.g., Cameroon), this leads to demands for liturgical adaptations e.g. It is then necessary to work on the prerequisites.
- Support for diversity. Share community contacts according to our sensitivities within the pastoral team

Churches share about Trans-ecclesiality (3)

- Formation plays an important role in articulating diversity (e.g., practice of evangelization by prison chaplains with evangelical sensitivity)
- Continuing formation has an impact on harmonization in the theological spectrum
- Difficulty in integrating fresh expressions into parish communities
- The boundary between the Presbytero-Synodal System and the Congregational Conception
- How to balance the composition of Community Councils among representatives of different sensitivities or origins
- Red lines for the integration of plurality: formation of reformed or evangelical pastors/presbytero-synodal system
- Need for a direction, a vision of good practices to deepen together (e.g., Faith as a dangerous memory)
 - faith and difference in experiences and interpretations – accept to fail and not always succeed –
- Promote “Theology of Flop” as Theology of Faith – Choosing Theology of What Fails
- The difficulties of dialogue with the new evangelical communities, there is no longer any common reference.

Summary by Félix Moser on the reflections of the Churches on the integration of ecclesiological diversity (1)

- Importance and complexity of the culture. It's important because it nourishes our curriculum, our customs, our education and our liturgy. Integrated elements since early childhood – This awareness highlights ethnic diversity – Culture and worship – what acceptability of these differences? Learn the language and culture of our loved ones – we need to remove the implicits that we believe we have mastered
- The Kairos of God for the debate with the other, when it is ready , the opportune moment
- Rediscovering a certain capacity of astonishment in the encounter with the other and what I think I know of him
- Refusal of false harmony – beware of escaping, of avoiding the subjects who annoy – to approach them in truth, even if there is no unanimity
- Take the time to understand, to take with me the subjects of astonishment. Take the time to present how I do it, and then to explain why I do it so, in order to tell which theology guides me. There is no theology above ground, out of context

Trans-ecclesiality – Summary F. Moser (2)

- Starting from practical models to explain our theologies.
- Congregationalism cannot take the place of the synodal presbytero – the ethics of conviction and responsibility – practicing acceptability in the name of the synodal decision. If I cannot make a sacramental gesture, I can delegate it to a colleague.
- The difficulties of dialogue with the new Gospel communities, when there is no longer a common reference.
- Do not give parishes the power to decide everything, make the integration of the local to the universal
- How to manage unmanageable people who have the ability to block everything

Trans-ecclesiality – Summary F. Moser (3)

- How to be caring without being naive to embrace difference – getting people out of their cognitive bubble
- Be careful to anticipate a certain number of problems: anticipate the understanding of the liturgical elements, before discord creeps into the community
- At what point is a theological question inevitable «status confessionis» or is it a limit that I cannot cross (Barmen's confession of faith)

Final exchange between participants (1)

What “lines of strength” should be retained from our common work, which can contribute to developing together the visibility of Latin Protestant Churches in diaspora situation

- We cannot aim for unanimity but ask ourselves the question of «how far can I live the difference» and from which the difference of practice or conception no longer seems tolerable to me
 - Culture not to overestimate, we run the risk of relativism and separatism. Mode of decision by consensus (see WCC), including discerning the Kairos. This makes it possible to feel the assembly, that people of a different position feel heard, taken into account. Attention to the majority/minority ratio
 - Be careful not to arrive at consensus texts that are too “soft”, we must retain some weight in our common decisions
- But also to be permeable to proposals of doctrinal texts even if they seem to us foreign to the reception

Final exchange between participants (2)

- During their exchange, participants co-construct a list of elements that constitute **“doctrinal red lines” in the integration of diversity, in the plurality that can structure:**

- the presbytero-synodal system
- an academic level of formation of pastors
- differentiate ethics from the recognition of ethics from legitimacy (recognition requires respect for the specificity of the other, I do not own the truth)
- the hermeneutic of Salvation through Grace (opposes the theology of growth and prosperity)
- The link between faith and reason

Final exchange between participants (3)

- Pay attention to religious movements that place their conception of the Gospel at the service of their political inspiration. Centrality of hermeneutics: our theologian professes a hidden God and the need for human mediation
- Beware of false harmony and have the courage to address latent problems, to explain
- Reference to the Concord of Leuenberg and the doctrinaire texts CEPE <https://www.leuenberg.eu/documents/>
- Diversity of ministries and needs of the Churches, to foster the attachment with our contemporaries, we need to think about it. Support for diversity
- Role of Testimonial – working on our new media relationships