Ecumenical dialogue on LGBTQ+ realities. Insights from a conference at MA 2023

In an atmosphere of trust and ecumenical partnership, participants from different churches, NGOs and contexts came together at the Mission Academy (MA) in Hamburg from 27 to 29 November 2023 to discuss "Contrasting Positions. An ecumenical exploration on LGBTQ+". On the basis of the seminar the organizers developed this summery. It was a consensus that no one should try to impose their own position on the other, but that we are called to work together to find ways to better protect people who have been deprived of their humanity and dignity.

Questions about sexual ethics were answered differently in the respective churches, even in churches of the same faith family. We felt this meeting was necessary because obviously there is a tightening of legislations against LGBTQ+ persons in various countries (e.g. Uganda, Kenya and Ghana as well as in Eastern Europe). These laws also have the effect of criminalising innocent individuals, thereby making them targets of increased hostilities and violence in their daily lives.

Some churches have welcomed stricter legislations, thereby providing a moral and spiritual foundation for governments to persecute and prosecute with impunity. Because this has become a challenge and also a test for co-operation, partnership work and encounters, it was an aim of the conference to talk about it together. Through the three days of being together, we have recognized that our interpretations of the Bible, are motivated and driven by diverse perspectives, therefore,

1. We believe in the existence of one Creator God, who created all creation including all human beings endowing every individual with the Image of God, and therefore worth of respect and dignity.
2. We affirm the need for continuing ecumenical collegial gatherings for deeper exchanges and dialogue
3. We affirm the need for processes of listening and learning from each other, especially, as we all respond to diverse lived realities
4. We affirm that protecting, to the best of our abilities, human life and dignity is a shared commitment and concern
5. We affirm the continuing legacies of colonization and colonial thinking in our ways of relating as children God and commit to engage both separately and collectively with the ecumenical agendas of decolonization and reparations

Churches should be a safer space for all marginalized including people of the LGBTQ+ community. The task of the churches is to take a stand against all forms of violence. Any form of incitement to violence was seen as a red line.

Misinformation that leads to social marginalisation or even suicide is contradicting the Gospel of Jesus Christ. In confronting as well all forms of racism and xenophobia, it is imperative to be guided by the liberating message of the Bible, which shows us ways to a respectful coexistence.

In the light of this conference we urge to address any single story about each other. The conference theme is part of a larger debate how to overcome global polarization and the rise of authoritarianism.

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1 Cf. "Conversations on the pilgrimage. An invitation to journey together on questions of human sexuality" by WCC 2022, p. 45f.