

# Preface

This volume contains the contributions made at the conference “Towards an Ecumenical Missiology: Witnessing Christ”. It marks the start of a series of publications documenting the presentations given during the series of conferences under the heading “Towards an Ecumenical Missiology”. This ecumenical initiative was launched by *missio* together with the Association of Protestant Churches and Missions in Germany (EMW) with a view to transcending denominational boundaries and fostering a global ecumenical discussion of issues related to mission. This initiative involved cooperation with their partners (the Baptist Theological Seminary in Elstal, the Evangelical Free Church School of Culture and Theology in Korntal and the Chair of Intercultural Theology and the Body at Ruhr University Bochum) in organising biennial international missiological conferences to bring together theologians from Africa, Asia, North America, the Middle East, Oceania, Latin America and Europe.

The first in this series of conferences entitled “Towards an Ecumenical Missiology: Witnessing Christ” was held at the Erbacher Hof academy and conference centre in Mainz from 15 to 18 July 2019. It was attended by 35 theologians from Africa, Asia, North America, the Middle East, Oceania, Latin America and Europe. In their presentations they examined the Christological perspectives that have a formative influence on their respective continent and in their individual churches. The speakers focused, in particular, on the missiological implications of the different contextual Christologies in order to initiate a discourse between them. The aim of the conference was to bring out the contextual and denominational convergences and divergences in the understanding of mission. There were debates on whether contextual or denominational locations were primarily formative in epistemological terms and thus helped to give missiology and theology an identity.

It transpired in the course of the conference that contextual Christologies in the different regions are obliged to address in their own different ways the issues arising from interreligious dialogue; ecological challenges; exclusionary nationalisms and ethnicisms; the emergence of new forms of spirituality; the increase in individualism and associated loneliness; scientific knowledge; the situation of post-socialist and post-modern atheism; and the experience of a hierarchical and centralist church. The view was expressed that in many contexts a Christology focused on the cross is not very helpful. While the concept of contextual theologies mostly applies to churches in the Global South, the conference showed that the churches and theologies in Europe and

North America, in particular, occasionally fall prey to the illusion that the theologies formulated in their own context have a universal claim (to the truth).

We hope the contributions to the first conference and the series of publications will prove helpful in transcending denominational boundaries in missiology and highlighting new perspectives for an ecumenical missiology.

Michael Biehl  
Claudia Jahnelt  
Michael Kisskalt  
Traugott Hopp  
Hanna Stahl  
Klaus Vellguth