

KoGe Blog # 11: “Tendencies towards exclusion affect us!” Voices from FBOs on peaceful, just and inclusive societies



In 2018, the KoGe working group on Religion and Development launched a platform of discussion bringing together faith-based partner organisations from Latin America in a workshop that was organized in Cuba. This opportunity for networking and exchange has been an important experience, bringing our partners closer together and allowing for a joint reflection on their societal roles as FBOs. Not astonishingly, increasing fundamentalist tendencies were identified as one of the major challenges faced by the partners in their daily work in the Latin-American context. In May 2019, the working group invited the same partner organisations to continue their discussion online, together with their partner organisations in Switzerland.

The following “Voices from FBOs” are a small selection of posts from this e-discussion entitled “our contribution to peaceful, just and inclusive societies”. We thank all those who have participated for their rich, important and honest contributions, which you can access under the [KoGe Forum](#).

“Inclusion is a debate in our society and in our churches. It relates especially to women and children. The unfortunate thing is that some churches perpetuate the macho system in our society based on the word of God. In the case of women, many cannot assume leadership positions in the churches. In the case of children and adolescents, we still think that they are our property and therefore ignore that they have rights – for instance the right to be heard and to express themselves freely. Our work must therefore also address children and adolescents who make up a third of the world’s population. We need to form a new generation living inclusive values and principles and who are in solidarity with each other.” (Yvon, Asociación Ágape, Peru)

“The fundamentalist current intends to homogenize a single evangelical discourse, not tolerating a discussion of the topics of gender and sexual diversity. Moreover, this discourse promotes homophobia and therefore rejects the inclusion of sexual minorities in religious spaces. In Peru, there is a current trend working at eradicating the word gender from the school curriculum. In our own ecclesial congregations, we experienced misogynistic attitudes a few weeks ago when a group of pastors celebrated the ratification of the non-participation of women in the governance of the Church on social networks. My own institution just witnessed a series of shocking verbal attacks. We were called “infiltrated feminists,” “pro abortionists,” “deceivers” and even “Power of Darkness”. It was said that we work to “discredit the Word of God”.

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These expressions come from brothers and sisters in evangelical churches, pastors, theology students from conservative seminaries, even theologians, among others. In Peru this antagonism and intolerant postures are experienced daily by people close to the ecumenical movement or who studied in ecumenical institutions. As FBOs, we must therefore strengthen our commitment to work for an inclusive society. We must contribute to overcome intolerant positions, complicit silence and refusal of debates.” (Efraín, AETE, Peru)

“Churches often behave far less inclusive than they pretend. They are susceptible to declaring dogmatic patterns as general truth and thereby excluding people who practice life concepts that are not compatible with these norms. A church fails on the question of inclusion when moral and social values are defined as universal and non-negotiable. The interaction between theology and social and cultural norms often leads to patterns of thought and action that prevent inclusion or promote exclusion. Churches are particularly susceptible to this. This inevitably leads to conflicts when people with different concepts of life and faith clash. This painful experience is currently being experienced by the United Methodist Church. It has about 12.5 million members and is part of the World Methodist Council with about 80 million members and a total of 80 member churches.

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At its special United Methodist General Conference in February this year, it was decided that the church would neither allow ordination of self-avowed practicing homosexual persons nor would it open the church doors for the blessing of same-sex couples. This being not enough, every violation of these regulations would be punished with suspension or exclusion. This decision has caused a shock wave in the Church. If this decision is confirmed at the next ordinary General Conference, it is very likely that the Church will split.” (Ueli, Connexio, Switzerland)

“Some churches have contributed to the polarization of society insofar as they refuse to include the points of view of diversity, or even worse, consider that these are not correct or even a sin. This gender blindness prevents churches from clearly expressing a prophetic voice that denounces injustice and, at the same time, from playing a mediating role in the processes of political and ideological polarization. However, FBOs and churches are also part of the solution. They are making an important contribution to the visibilisation and denunciation of religious fundamentalisms that sustain the exclusion of other worldviews and, in the daily practice of communities and organizations, lead to the exclusion of people, projects and resources. These FBOs work for the development of educational projects embracing more open and inclusive paradigms regarding the diversity of people, practices, methodologies, beliefs and political visions. They work on the re-signification of faith in communities and help them to link up with contextual challenges. Other FBOs collaborate with women’s organizations supporting women’s rights.

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An example is our joint work in a feminist theological project that denounces violence against women in the name of fundamentalist religious arguments. Along the same lines, we are currently working in a network to organize ourselves with other FBOs to actively contribute to the UNFCCC COP 25 that will take place in Chile in December 2019 (Santiago Climate Change Conference). The idea is to create spaces of dialogue between organizations that try to strengthen alternative views to the fundamentalisms that are polarizing our society.” (Doris, CEDM, Chile)