

# The Nashville Statement in German

I can still remember the day when I first saw the Nashville Statement. It was at the end of August in 2017. After reading it for the first time, I thought: this statement pretty much addresses the questions we are currently discussing in German-speaking communities. It creates the transparency and clarity we need to face the challenges that anti-essentialist schools of thought and the LGBTQ+ movement have brought to our society and the church. The chosen form, with its affirmations and denials, helps avoid misunderstandings and ambiguities.

As editor of *Evangelium21*, I promptly contacted our chairman, Pastor Matthias Lohmann. He gave a similarly positive assessment of the document, and within just a few days the leadership of our reformed-oriented network got behind the statement. We wanted to make it known not only in Germany, Austria, and Switzerland, but we also wanted to provide an accurate German language translation as soon as possible.

We are grateful that Colin Smothers of CBMW granted us the translation rights. As early as mid-September, we were able to make a digital edition of the Nashville Statement available for free download. On September 21, 2017, we issued the following press release:

Based on the observation that Western culture in the 21st century has become increasingly post-Christian and has begun to "redefine entirely what it means to be a human being," the Nashville Statement calls on the church to gratefully affirm God's beautiful, created order as set forth in Scripture and evident in nature. "We do not belong to ourselves. Our true identity as male and female has been given to us by God. To try to make something of ourselves other than what God created us to be is not only foolish but doomed to failure," the declaration says. It urges recognition of the equality of men and women and at the same time affirmation of the differences between the sexes.<sup>1</sup>

A few days later, we were also able to hand out a print edition free of charge. The interest was enormous. Since then, the third edition of the booklet has been published. We have sent out several thousand copies or distributed them at conferences. Like-minded networks have drawn attention to the document and soon other organizations requested reprint permissions.

Within confessional Christian circles, the response was overwhelmingly positive. Many brothers and sisters were pleased to finally have a document that could serve as a basis for bringing clarity to heated discussions. What is more, many increasingly saw the field of sexual ethics as an important touchstone for the confessional stability of Christian congregations and had come to realize that

<sup>1</sup>"Pressemitteilung zur Veröffentlichung der Nashville Erklärung," September 21, 2017, [https://www.evangelium21.net/downloads/pdf/pressemitteilungen/Pressemitteilung\\_E21\\_Nashville.pdf](https://www.evangelium21.net/downloads/pdf/pressemitteilungen/Pressemitteilung_E21_Nashville.pdf).



biblical pastoral counseling can only succeed if it is preceded by a theological clarification.

But there was also a headwind. Nadia Bolz-Weber, the managing editor of a major evangelical internet platform, countered the Nashville Statement with a statement of her own, the Denver Statement. That statement's conclusion



is revealing: “Oh yes: Which statement is more in line with my own faith? Denver. Basically, I can sum it up with the beginning of the tenth statement[s]: For the sake of freedom, Christ set us free, not to make us slaves again to new rules and fears.”<sup>2</sup> Reverend Wielie Elhorst of Amsterdam, in an interview with a publication of the Evangelical Church in Germany, asserted that “The [Nashville] statement denies and rejects all the theological and biblical scientific research findings of the last decades. These help to better understand sexuality and gender identity, also regarding the world in which we live. The statement also does not refer to any sound biblical hermeneutics.”<sup>3</sup>

At the beginning of 2019, we suddenly had unimaginably high access rates to the digital edition of the German Nashville Statement. The reason was that the weekly magazine *DIE ZEIT*, which is very well-known in

Germany, reported on the debate that had flared up in the Netherlands. In the digital edition of the magazine, our website was linked and the statement was downloaded by numerous readers. *DIE ZEIT*, however —not surprisingly— backed the critics of the Nashville Statement, reporting, “According to media reports, several Protestant churches raised the rainbow flag to show that everyone is welcome. Dutch prosecutors are investigating the criminal nature of the text.”<sup>4</sup>

It was clear to most well-meaning readers in the German-speaking world, of course, that the statement was not intended to be read as a political declaration, but was about necessary clarifications within the church. Here in Germany the Nashville Statement has served us very well. Perhaps more than elsewhere in the world, we are currently struggling over Christian sexual ethics. We are grateful that the authors of the Nashville Statement are helping in this debate. Matthias Lohmann stresses

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the statement's importance: “Although being a Christian must not be confused with a sexual morality, we cannot abandon the biblical view of sexuality.” God, as the creator of human life, “has given us a very good and beautiful order to protect family life and sexuality, which, after all, makes human beings very vulnerable.”

We believe the Nashville Statement upholds this beautiful, God-given order. ✕

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in Chief at Evangelium21*

<sup>4</sup>“Konservative Christen unterzeichnen Nashville-Erklärung,” *Zeit Online*, January 8, 2019, <https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/zeitgeschehen/2019-01/niederlande-konservative-christen-nashville-erklarung-homosexualitaet-kritik>, accessed September 15, 2022.

<sup>2</sup>“Nashville’ und ‘Denver’ im Vergleich: Wie glaubst du?” *Auf’N’Kaffee*, September 2017, <https://aufnkaffee.net/2017/09/nashville-und-denver-im-vergleich-wie-glaubst-du/>, accessed September 25, 2022.

<sup>3</sup>*Ibid.*