

3.-5. November 2023  
University of Hamburg

# The Christian Peace Witness

Nonviolence as a  
Non-Conformist Lifestyle  
- put to the Test!



Symposium of the Center for Peace Church Theology (University of Hamburg),  
the Society for Free Church Theology and Journalism (GFTP),  
the Museum for Russian-German Cultural History  
and the Mennonite Historical Society

# The Christian Peace Witness

## Nonviolence as a Non-Conformist Lifestyle - put to the Test!

For many Christians of the Anabaptist churches, especially those from the Historic Peace Churches, the nonviolence taught by Jesus means refraining from military service, renouncing revenge, and responding to persecutors and wrongdoers solely with nonviolent action. In view of the current global events, this "non-conformist way of life" is a salutary challenge, especially its concrete practice of faith. When, if not now, is the time to inquire about the indispensable Christian witness for peace? At the joint symposium, the biblical foundations and spiritual sources for the Christian peace witness will be examined.

The symposium is supported by a unique collaboration of various institutions and initiatives within the Anabaptist spectrum, the universities of Hamburg and Oldenburg, the Mennonite Historical Society, and the Museum for Russian-German Cultural History. The international and interdisciplinary orientation will broaden and enrich the discussion.

A quote by Martin Luther King may offer encouragement:

**"The hope of a secure and livable world  
lies with disciplined nonconformists,  
who are dedicated to justice, peace, and brotherhood."**

**King in a sermon on Rom 12**

# Friday, 3rd November

14:00 **Welcome and Introduction to the Symposium**

## **Theme I: The Christian Peace Witness - Foundations, Spirituality, Lifestyle**

Deborah Storek: God's Command of War und Moses' Messengers of Peace (Dt 2,26): Biblical Discussions on War and Peace (lecture in German)

### **Coffee Break**

Dominik Gautier: Making Peace with Nature? Theological Considerations with Non-Conformist Henry Thoreau (lecture in German)

Nindy Sasonko: Politics of the Open Casket. Death of a Son, Non-Conformity, and a Time for Justice

18:30 **Light Dinner / General Assembly of the GFTP**

20:00 Fernando Enns and Panelists: The Reception of the Anabaptist Peace Witness in the Recent Ecumenical Movement (panel discussion in German)

### **Evening Prayer**

*Light dinner, panel discussion and evening prayer will take place at the Mennonitengemeinde zu Hamburg und Altona*

# Saturday, 4th November

09:00 **Morning Prayer**

## **Theme II: The Influence of the Christian Peace Witness on Churches and Societies**

Andrea Strübind: The non-conformist Influence on state-constitutions (lecture in German)

### **Coffee Break**

Robert Beckford: Christian approaches to restorative justice as a pathway to peacemaking in the context of "race" relations in European societies

11:45 **Theme III: Contested Peace-witness - Experiences of dictatorship and democracy (Repression, Assimilation, Resilience)**

David Gushee: Contrasting Christian Politics in the US. Authoritarian Reactionary/White Christian Nationalism vs. Movements of Christian Resistance for Egalitarian Democracy, Peace, and Justice

12:30 **Lunch Break**

14:00 Small Groups focusing on specific topics

15:00 Nadya Beljakova: Non-conformist existence in the late Soviet Union: Issues around military service and participation in peace initiatives in Free Church congregations (lecture in German)

### **Coffee Break**

Katya Tolstaya: Propaganda and Weaponization of History (lecture in German)

Kornelius Ens: Identity and Bi-Culturality - A Russian German Perspective (lecture in German)

19:00 **Light Dinner**

20:00 "How Shadows Become" - Concert Reading with Lilli Gebhard and Matthias Lang (Concert Reading in German)

*Light dinner and concert reading will take place at the Ev.-Freikirchliche Gemeinde Altona*

# Sunday, 5th November

09:00 Morning Prayer

**Theme IV: The Christian Peace Witness - Ambivalences, Disruptions, Potentials**

Andrés Pacheco-Lozano: "Mennonite Innocence". Ambivalences and Critical Self-Reflection

**Coffee Break**

Hyejung Jessie Yum: Decolonial Peace at the Intersection of War, Colonialism, and Transnationality. A Korean-North American Perspective

Astrid von Schlachta: Anabaptist Peace-Witness in the History and the Commemoration of the Anabaptist Movement 1525-2025 (lecture in German)

Final discussion with summary of the conference

13:00 Blessing

## Organizational Matters

**Registration:**

Please register by mail to Doris Franzbach an ([friedenskirchen@uni-hamburg.de](mailto:friedenskirchen@uni-hamburg.de))  
Registration is requested by September 30th.

**Costs:**

The conference fee is 30€. Admission is free for students.  
Participants are responsible for arranging their own accommodations.

**Translation:**

Simultaneous translation is offered

**Venue:**

The main venue is the University of Hamburg.

The evening events and the light dinner will take place on Friday at the Mennonite Church of Hamburg and Altona (Mennonitenstraße 20) and on Saturday at the Ev.-Freikirchliche Gemeinde Altona (Suttnerstraße 18).

## Organizer

