

Theme Year

23

daring! **living non-violently**



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Left: Kunstprojekt Leopard-Panzer in Strickvariante
vor dem Militärgeschichtlichen Museum in Dresden.
Middle: Der Deserteur von Boardman Robinson.
Ein Antikriegs-Cartoon aus dem Jahr 1916 (zu Seite 12).
Right: Banksy, Friedenstaube in Bethlehem, Banksy, CC BY 2.0

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Anabaptist Year of Commemoration – „daring! living non-violently“

While planning this issue of **Daring!** we had no idea how relevant the topic of non-violence would be this year. At any time it presents a challenge to our thinking, actions and words; but this challenge has markedly increased through war and the experience of war with all the consequences for human life this entails.

Non-violence in the course of Anabaptist history means more than merely forgoing armed force or rejecting military service. It was based on the conviction that orienting on Jesus, whose actions were completely non-violent, was crucial for one's own life. The intention to live non-violently opens the door to a wide spectrum of theological and practical issues that have been discussed controversially in Anabaptist churches right up to the present time.

This year's theme **Daring! Living Non-violently** encourages us to think and discuss. Does not freedom from violence already begin in our minds and then extend seamlessly to our words? What words do we utter and what is our stance when we talk? How do we react to our neighbour? Each of us is invited personally to reflect how a loud call for non-violence in our society must ring out clearly. 'Freedom' from violence demonstrates also that we have the 'freedom' to reject violence both in our personal lives and within society. A genuine challenge!

For at least 500 years people have been thinking about this challenge. Often they were misunderstood, became laughing-stock, were ostracised, physically abused, and even killed. But over the 500 years of the Anabaptist movement it has become clear that many tiny but courageous steps can achieve change on the path to peace. Therefore, this publication is an invitation not just to face the issue of non-violence but also to make use of one's own possibilities for seeking peace. These possibilities might even be greater than we can imagine.

*Gyburg Beschnidt, Bernd Densky, Andreas Liese,
Astrid von Schlachta, Jochen Wagner*

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Word of Greeting from the German Federal Minister of Home Affairs

Nancy Faeser

In preparation for the coming celebrations for 500 years since the first believers' baptism in 1525 this issue *Daring! Living Non-violently* asks a question that has not lost its relevance even today, above all when we consider the appalling Russian war of aggression in Ukraine. How can a life together be possible in a context of non-violence? Any society can only be successful when its citizens coexist in an atmosphere of peace and respect, because violence questions the very essence of society.

Non-violence was a major tenet from the very start of the Anabaptist movement. It is based on Jesus' injunction to his disciples to love their fellow human beings including their enemies and to pray for those who are persecuting them (Matthew 5, 43–45). The Anabaptists took him unconditionally at his word, which meant their position was contrary to their society, which at times gave religious legitimacy to violence.

The history of the Anabaptist movement also demonstrates how pointing to the same Holy Scriptures can lead to opposing interpretations. This reminds us too of the roots of our own legal tradition and how peace could be integrated in the continuously changing definition and consolidation of citizens' rights and liberty over the centuries.

Respecting peace and freedom of religious conviction and conscience have become fundamental axioms of our communal existence. We view them as universal and inalienable. It is a task for all of society to consolidate these principles; discussion and debate play a major role in this. To maintain them is the common objective of state and society. Religious communities bear important responsibility in this respect.

When reading this year's theme I trust you will discover many new insights. May your discussions reach many open ears and serve to increase our understanding of our history and its foundations.



The General Secretary of the Ecumenical Council of Churches

Professor Dr. Ioan Sauca



Among the various church families that meet during the General Assemblies and the Central Committee sessions of the Ecumenical Council are the peace churches which originated from the Anabaptist movement. Their convictions led them to support non-violence with determination and in this way they made an impact on the history of the ECC. This has had special relevance for the *Decade for Overcoming Violence*. This began in Berlin in 2001 and ended in 2011 with the International Ecumenical Peace Convocation in Kingston, Jamaica, with its adoption of a call for a just peace. Since then the ECC has focused on the ethical principle of a just peace. In the eleventh General Assembly of the ECC (31st August to 8th September 2022 in Karlsruhe) this was reaffirmed.

Representatives from the churches in Ukraine reported on the horrors of war in their country and how they long for peace. The General Assembly passed a motion about the war there. They demanded peace and justice in the whole European region and condemned the war in the Ukraine. The churches are urged to offer humanitarian aid and to fight for peace. There are similar statements addressing the conflicts and wars in the Middle East, West Papua, Nagorno Karabakh and on the Korean Peninsula.

Of special relevance for this issue is another official statement: *What Serves Peace, Pointing the World to Reconciliation and Unity*. This is the reply to the General Assembly's theme: *The Love of Christ Changes, Reconciles and Unites the World*.

This is the corresponding text:

We recognise that to make peace means to face racism, xenophobia, anti-Semitism, hate speech and other forms of hate. These problems have all been on the increase and intensified in the past years, being fuelled above all by populist and nationalist movements, as well as by crises and rivalry for essential resources, by economic inequality and injustice, by conflicts between states and resurgence of war and the growing darkening spectre of a nuclear war.

These threats against freedom violate the basic principles of Christian faith in a shameful manner. The call for dialogue, for genuine encounter and for the desire to understand others is the true heart of ecumenism and a vital part of making peace. It is the task of the churches to embody the theme: The Love of Christ Changes, Reconciles and Unites the World.

Saying 'No!' to violence has its source in the 'Yes!' to life through the love of the Trinitarian God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit, which we human beings experience in Jesus Christ. He brings life and justice to all of us. My hearty thanks to the planning committee for 500 years of the Anabaptist movement 2025 e.V. for enabling me to address and greet the readership of the issue of 2023. It would be wonderful if you would also discuss the statements of the ECC as well as the contributions in this issue on a local and national level. Conversely, the ECC would be enriched if the results of the process of reflection during these five years could be shared with others within international ecumenism.

I wish you God's blessing with all my heart for your pilgrimage for justice, reconciliation and unity.

Regional Bishop of the Protestant Church in Central Germany with Responsibility for the Peace Committee of the EKD (Evangelical Church of Germany)

Friedrich Kramer

Living non-violently – what an enormous challenge for us – for our life together in our families and our circle of friends, and above all in the larger context of groups and states! After all, violence is a reality, ever since we humans have existed. It is often combined with the pursuit of power and belongs to our existence as men and women. It defines all too frequently our emotions, thoughts, speech and actions and those who have suffered violence are often traumatised for many years afterwards.

The Bible knows about this and talks repeatedly about people involved in violent conflicts. Nevertheless, the Biblical stories open up impressive perspectives for peace and reconciliation, for example Jacob, whose guilt towards Esau became clear as he wrestled with God after he had deceived Esau into relinquishing his blessing. The great visions of the prophets unfold the hope of future peace.

Jesus' words regarding peace have this hope as their starting-point, but his words are more radical. When he is taken prisoner in the Garden of Gethsemane he commands his disciples to refrain from violence and in the Sermon on the Mount he blesses the peacemakers. Indeed, his own life demonstrates what it means not to pay evil back with evil, to bless when cursed, to pardon where hate rules.

Jesus' example was the benchmark for the Anabaptist movement from the beginning about 500 years ago and they had to experience painfully that their desire to live non-violently, which they took literally, was not 'normal', because it was beyond the 'norm' of society. Their refusal to take oaths and to 'bear the sword' put them in opposition to the consensus both of society and of the church and they were persecuted, banished or killed.

Here in central Germany, in Thuringia, Fritz Erbe, an Anabaptist, became a symbol of freedom of belief and of conscience and also of non-violence. Much of the population of Eisenach supported him. After nearly ten years of imprisonment in the Stork Tower of Eisenach's city walls, he died in abject misery in the dungeon of Wartburg castle. Injustice although he was in the right! It was only in 2010 that we in the Lutheran church asked forgiveness of our Anabaptist brothers and sisters.



So is Christ's call to live strictly non-violently a superhuman task and therefore impossible? Might it be a heavenly peace, but unsuitable in our world? The history of the non-violent Anabaptists demonstrates that being a genuine disciple of Jesus can lay the foundation for a sustainable peace in the here and now. Because they dared to live non-violently in times of religious intolerance and atrocious wars of religion, they prepared the way for freedom of belief and of conscience, which was guaranteed later by law and is for us in Europe now a matter of course.

500 years later we are being reminded of this heritage and honouring it. Indeed, in our time violent conflicts are on the increase and have reached Europe, so the brave decisions of conscience of the pacifist Anabaptists are exceptionally topical and we should consider them anew in their function as role models.

God, the bringer of peace, bless this work of commemoration of 500 years of the Anabaptist movement, which is being prepared with such enthusiasm and originality. I hope it is widely received and encourages us all to dare to act and live non-violently, so that heavenly peace may gain more possession of the world in which we live.

Astrid von Schlachta

“... They Even Completely Reject Killing.” The Question of Violence among the Anabaptists



Der Deserteur von Boardman Robinson.
Ein Antikriegs-Cartoon aus dem Jahr 1916. Jesus vor einem
Erschießungskommando bestehend aus Soldaten aus fünf
verschiedenen europäischen Ländern
(Die USA hatten sich noch nicht am Krieg beteiligt.).

“True believing Christians”, as referred to in a letter that the circle around Konrad Grebel in Zürich in 1524 sent to Thomas Müntzer, “would neither wage war, nor in the name of the authorities make judgements over life and death”, since they “reject killing”. Grebel and his companions increasingly uttered criticism of Ulrich Zwingli’s politics. They already favoured baptism of those of a mature age, but were not yet *Anabaptists*. They were of the opinion that the theologian from Mühlhausen was completely in the wrong regarding the question of violence, although otherwise they had a great deal of sympathy for Müntzer’s point of view. True Christians are like *sheep among wolves* and need to be ‘baptised’ in fear and distress, in persecution and suffering, because they were seeking the ‘spiritual country’ and not the ‘world’.

This self-perception was also expressed in the well-known words of Hans Denck three years later: *To exercise violence and to rule is not allowed for any Christian who desires to praise his Lord*. Denck concedes that worldly authorities do have the power to ensure law and order, but it is the task of Christians to help to live better lives. This cannot happen, he believes, with a sword in one’s hand. He adds further comments that confirm non-violence as a premise of Christian existence, for example, statements made by Michael Sattler, Hans Hut, Menno Simons or by Hutterite writers.

Nevertheless, without casting a look at the nuances in the varied Anabaptist spectrum of non-violence, the observations on their point-of-view remain incomplete. An example is Balthasar Hubmaier, whose Anabaptist reformation in Nikolsburg could only have taken place because of the blessing of the city elders, the aristocratic von Lichtensteins. He regarded the question of violence pragmatically, since in his opinion Christians are indeed part of ‘the world’ and only Jesus Christ could say: *My Kingdom is not of this world*. Thus for him, there is nothing unjust about Christians bearing the sword, albeit it may only be used in an administrative office.

Anabaptists and violence – a pairing that cannot be reduced to simple answers. It is also completely unsuitable to convey romanticised ideas of Anabaptist intransigence. What does Anabaptist history demonstrate in general about the attitude to violence? Domestic violence? Compromise in daily life and at work? Violent language? In the 16th century polemic speech could be heard everywhere and had become a popular form of expression – Anabaptists were by no means innocent of this. The authorities and those outside the fold were insulted and condemned. Even between the different Anabaptist groups there was sometimes a very hard tone of speech and vilification towards the others.

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The subject ‘domestic violence’ has never been properly examined in Anabaptist history. Studies in the Netherlands have shown there are numerous examples. In September 1618 Reyer Jansen and his wife Annetie had to appear before the elders of the Waterland church in Amsterdam. He was accused of beating his wife so hard that she became bedridden and also of rampaging in the house of Martin Joost. His wife for her part had such a fierce quarrel with Joost’s wife that they hit each other.

Military service is never something which is either black or white. Anabaptists soon found loopholes. Even in the 16th century there were legal ways of avoiding military service, although these were not to be had cheaply – one could send a substitute. The story is told of Balthasar Grasbanter from the Moravian town of Znaim that he had nothing against the town being protected by guards or watchmen. He paid a man to do this in his place day and night. This procedure was common into the 19th century and enabled the Anabaptists and then the Mennonites to fulfil their duty as citizens and at the same time to remain faithful to their convictions. But could this practice also be compatible with a person’s conscience? Was it not profoundly hypocritical to distance oneself from war but simultaneously to pay another person to bear weapons and to kill? ‘Is it truly right to expect another man to be paid for doing something that my own conscience forbids me to do?’ This question was asked by Christian Unzicker, an Amish from Hesse, in 1867. He answered the question himself and opined it was indeed legitimate, because ultimately the men were paid as soldiers. A man received his wages ‘who was doing something for me that he would do in any case.’ And besides, the man was receiving money which helped him to improve his own circumstances in life.

Obviously, not all Anabaptists were able to pay for a substitute. On the contrary, some men had to go to war due to their poverty like the Anabaptists Ide Klaes and Gilles Cornelesz in the 17th century in the Netherlands. At least this guaranteed a decent wage. Behind the scenes

there were other ways of earning money. Cord Roosen II (1570–1653), the father of Geerritt Roosen, who was later the preacher in Hamburg, is reported to have produced gunpowder of the highest quality and during the Thirty Years War operated three powder mills near Ratzeburg. ‘Does that mean the distressing war years were quite lucrative for Cord’s business?’ Berend Carl Roosen asked this question in his book *The Story of our House* in 1905. Interestingly, a stream near Wüstenfelde, where Menno Simons spent his final years, is still called Pulverbek (Powder Stream) today. The name points to a powder mill run by the Mennonites which is documented as early as 1600. Anabaptists and violence: a complex subject with many nuances and grey areas. It cannot be reduced to the simple question – *military service – yes or no?*

QUELLE

No-one may use violence to force his faith on another person, for faith is a free gift of God. It is unjust to impose faith by violence or pressure on somebody else or to kill them for their heresy... It is a characteristic of the true church of Christ that it suffers and endures persecution, but never persecutes others.

Menno Simons

zit. nach: *Mennonitisches Gesangbuch*, hg. von der
Arbeitsgemeinschaft Mennonitischer Gemeinden in Deutschland,
2. Aufl., 2015, S. 1214.

Christoph Wiebe

Do Mennonites reject Military Service? The Refusal to do Military Service under Discussion



Landsknecht, von Hans Sebald Beham, 1540

'Mennonites refuse to do military service', is often stated. This sweeping statement is not quite correct. A critical reconsideration of the use of violence by the state, or the refusal to associate oneself with this, is part of a fluctuating concept, with which the minority religion of the Mennonites sought to distance itself from society. The rejection of military service is one of the components, but remains a variable and repeatedly appears in discussions.

From the beginning the Anabaptists shared the general intention of the Reformation to reshape the life of the individual and society according to the spirit of the Gospel. Where the Anabaptists were successful they had no difficulty in accepting the legitimate authority of the governing powers, when this accorded with their understanding of the Bible. But where Anabaptists could not gain recognition and experienced helplessness, ostracism and persecution they discovered anew the statements in the Bible referring to the readiness to suffer as disciples of Jesus. This ambiguity could already be seen in Zürich during the 1520s, when the Anabaptists in the country areas around Zürich soon developed a different approach from those who formed a minority in the city. This found its continuation in the Anabaptist town of Waldshut, which in 1525 joined the uprising of 'ordinary people' (Peasants' War), and later in the Anabaptist centres of Nikolsburg (1526) and Münster (1534–1535). Legitimate authority of the governing powers (the 'Sword') was considered to be equally justified as was military defence, when even the women fought alongside their menfolk as in Münster.

Konrad Grebel went on a different course when he stated in September 1524 that Christians are helpless sheep among wolves (Matthew 10,16) and then Michael Sattler transferred an ethic of perfection onto all Christians and in 1527 he drafted a concept of separatism in his 'Brüderliche Vereinigung' (Brotherly Association), which above all was espoused by the Hutterite Anabaptists. Sattler's main interest is not the rejection of military service, but rather a consistent separatism. Under interrogation he denied that the rulers have the right to use any form of defence against the Turkish invaders.

Soldiers in the Reformation period at the start of the early modern era were mainly mercenaries. As yet there was no military service. After the times of persecution during the Reformation period Mennonites were increasingly tolerated as citizens which also involved various duties like guard duty, helping to defend the town and participation and civic self-administration. In many cases there were provisions to enable the Mennonites to be freed from the duties by paying a sum of money or having a substitute.

Christoph Wiebe

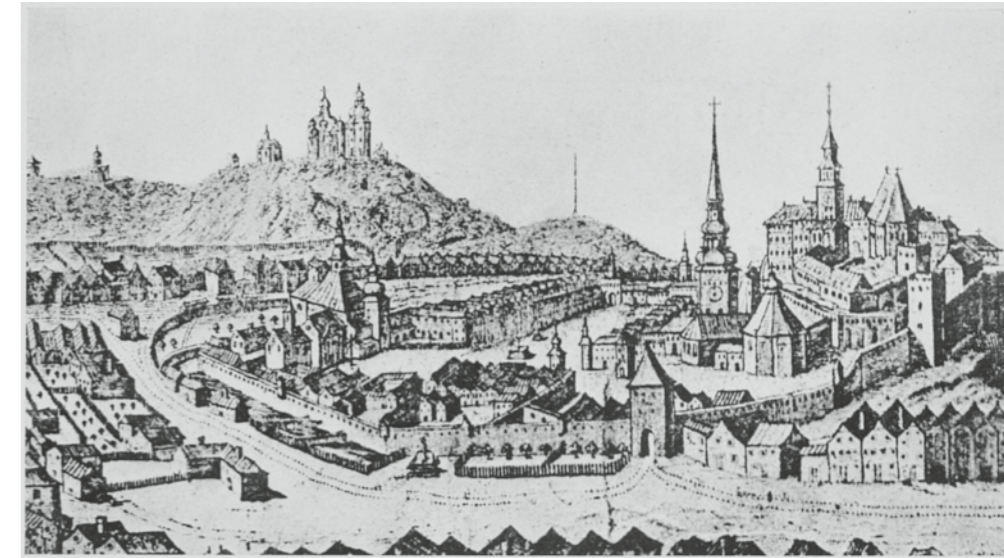
Pastor der Mennonitengemeinde Krefeld

This happened a great deal, when the states were setting up their armies after the Thirty Years War and were calling upon the citizens of their territories.

Paying money for exemption was the usual course of action. People meant economic power and were in demand. According to the legal situation of 'Anabaptists' in the national states the Mennonites were still ostracised and were dependent

on the goodwill of the rulers, who were glad recipients of the financial bonus. Their 'privileges' were in reality discrimination. That was clear, for example, in Krefeld, where in 1736 the town and from 1748 the province were freed from the obligation to deploy soldiers, but the Mennonites still had to pay for the privilege. In the country areas of Prussia, where a population surplus formed the reservoir of soldiers, it was not merely the Mennonites who saw the possibility of paying collectively in a positive light – it offered protection for them all. The collective 'defencelessness' gave a sense of identity and was part of a successful survival strategy.

After the French Revolution compulsory military service became customary and the situation changed unmistakably. According to the attitude of the Mennonites to modern conditions, to state and society, to reject military service became central to Mennonite identity or was relegated in favour of other distinguishing characteristics. The Mennonites were able to achieve exceptional status in Prussia (1868) and in Tsarist Russia (1875), which lasted until the end of the First World War and allowed them to do alternative public service, for example in non-combat roles or as paramedics. The fact that many Mennonites still chose to serve in the combat troops proves that the plausibility of this exceptional status had been lost.



Stadtansicht von Nikolsburg 1678
(aus dem Buch "Balthasar Hübsmaier" von Henry Clay Vedder)

When the Machnowsky were inflicting their reign of terror in the south of the disintegrating Tsarist Empire, the Mennonite colonies armed themselves in self-defence.

In the Second World War the Mennonites had no way of refusing to do military service; otherwise they would be executed. At least there is no known case. Also in the USA and Canada there were many Mennonite soldiers in both World Wars. After the Second World War things changed in Europe as well with regard to their own history under the influence of North American Mennonites, who had been developing a new understanding of a 'Peace Church'. Whereas most Mennonite men in Germany during the 1960s did military service, their number declined in the following decades, as also in society in general. Mennonites see themselves nowadays as part of society.

In the past 20 years there has been re-evaluation of Mennonite history, in which the expression 'non-violence' has been pivotal, but since the Russian war of aggression against the Ukraine all of society as well as the Mennonites themselves are facing new questions.

Frank Fornaçon

Will the Peace Movement Fail When Faced with War? The Establishment of the World Association for the Friendship of Churches 1914

Sitting on the terrace of the Insel Hotel in Konstanz drinking a cappuccino, I am looking over the lake towards the snow-covered peaks of the Alps, while the boats of the *White Fleet* pull into the harbour. A peaceful scene today as in 1914, when people were waiting in the same idyllic place for the special editions of the newspapers. The news came; general mobilisation. At the station the soldiers of the 6th Baden Infantry Regiment No. 114 were assembling. They went to war, their flags waving, but only 200 out of the original 3,200 soldiers returned at the end of the war. In the local press there was scarcely a mention that in the same posh hotel at the same time 90 representatives of Europe's protestant churches met to try and find a way to avoid the coming war. They came from France, Belgium, the USA, England, Sweden, Norway, Denmark and Holland and of course from Germany. On the agenda of the conference was the establishment of the World Association



Inselhotel in Konstanz

for the Friendship of Churches. Even before the conference could begin its work the foreign representatives had to leave Konstanz in the railway carriages waiting for them or cross over to nearby Switzerland. A lot of invited guests could not even reach Konstanz because of the turmoil from the general mobilisation. Those present declared the establishment of the World Association and left the area. Does that mean the peace movement in the pre-war period had failed? Around the turn of the 20th century faith in progress

was increasingly widespread. The hope was that the worldwide growth of Christian civilization would give a boost to the pursuit of peace. Disarmament consultations among the European powers in Den Haag were accompanied by the efforts of the churches to promulgate a peaceful coexistence. In 1908 100 German ministers, including some prominent professors like Adolf von Harnack and free-church men like the Baptist Friedrich-Wilhelm Simoleit, set off for England. There they were given a warm welcome.

Everyone talked about the responsibility of the Christian nations for peace. As a result many English church leaders travelled to Germany one year later. They were greeted with great pomp. The legacy of this meeting was the plan to form a world council that was to be launched in Konstanz in 1914.

In 1414–1418 Konstanz had already been the scene for a Council, called to overcome a European divide. In the Catholic church there had been three Popes wrestling for power for a while. The Council was essential in ending this dispute. For Protestants the memory of this Council had another meaning. Beyond the ending of the division it was a question of reforming the church. Contending for the demands of the reformers was Johann Huss, who had introduced reforms in Bohemia. The powerful church leaders condemned these changes and Johann Huss was burned at the stake outside the city gates. A century later Martin Luther alluded to Huss as a trailblazer of the Reformation.

James Rushbrook, who was the pastor of a church in London, was also present in Konstanz. He was one of the organisers of the visits in 1908/1909 and published the magazine of the World Association, the *Peacemaker* - its name was later changed to *Goodwill*. The edition ran to 67,000 copies. Rushbrook had studied in Germany, was married to a German and was a friend of John Clifford, the President of the Baptist World Alliance. He maintained lively correspondence with the social pedagogue Friedrich Siegmund-Schultze, who was especially sensitive to the political and social responsibility of the churches.

By 1914 the war could not be prevented and the World Alliance appeared to have failed in its intentions. As the war went on Christians on both sides identified themselves with the nationalistic intentions of their governments. It was not easy even for the Christians to find any common ground of mutual understanding.

The war had destroyed many illusions. At the same time it became necessary to find ways of preventing further evil. The World Association worked hard during the 1920s to 'make the voice of God's will heard in these faithless times.' The German Baptist Herbert Patrik penned these words in 1928 in the *Hilfsboten*, a magazine for Baptist preachers. 'A form of Christianity which merely asks the question what an individual gains from it and only concerns itself with the afterlife is a significant narrowing of the Gospel.' After Patrik the new General Secretary of the World Association was Dietrich Bonhoeffer, who stated that the World Association was doing something which is 'so vital that every soul should desire to find answers to these burning questions.' The World Association tried in the 1920s and 1930s to learn lessons from the First World War and what caused it. So he tried to find solutions for the intensified problems of minorities caused by the peace treaties after 1918, because they were threatening peace. After World War I the World Association was unable to gain complete trust from the Protestant and Free Churches. Only the *Bekennende Kirche* (Confessing Church) under Bonhoeffer's influence held fast to the concept of reconciliation with enemies as a path to maintain peace.

The path set out in Konstanz in 1914 had little influence politically but became one source of the readiness to reach reconciliation internationally after 1919 and 1945. The World Association and the International Covenant of Reconciliation were eventually absorbed in the Ecumenical Movement, which had as one main tenet working for peace. In retrospect, the endeavours of 1914 became an important element of the work of the churches to bring about peace after the Second World War.

Frank Fornaçon

Pastor i.R. im Bund Evangelisch-Freikirchlicher Gemeinden

Andrea Strübind

The Historic Peace Churches. A Vision of those Churches Practising Believers' Baptism



The 1920s were characterised everywhere by the experiences of the First World War and its disastrous consequences. In ecumenical Christianity the co-operation and engagement of the various peace movements were intensified. These impulses were also taken up in the USA by those churches that had long been involved in witnessing for peace because of their deep desire for peace. In these churches through the general mobilisation and military service the war had led the majority of the members to reject the basic principle of non-violence or to adapt to the new situation. So it was necessary to find a form of reorientation in the peace witness.

In this context the churches began co-operate in actively securing peace and teaching people how they can learn to practise peace. Finally, a new name was coined: the *Historic Peace Churches*. In the seminal articles about its genesis a conference in Kansas in 1935 is usually considered to be the date when it all began. Representatives of the Mennonites, the Church of the Brethren and the Quakers tried for the first time to formulate their principles for a common Christian theology of peace. The origins and the characteristic individual features of these three churches were very different. In the archives of Bethel College in Newton, Kansas an extensive collection of material about the origins and the vision for the 'historical peace churches' is preserved, which points to a new understanding of what happened.

Six meetings took place between 1922 and 1931 before the conference in 1935. This was given the title: 'The Conference of Pacifist Churches'. The initiator was Wilbur K. Thomas (1882–1953), a Quaker. These conferences proved that the experience of World War One and the conflict-ridden situation of the pacifist-minded and often vilified conscientious objectors was a driving force of the initiative. Of great importance was a conference in 1931, held in Mount Moris, the theological College of the Brethren in Illinois. An intensive and controversial debate about Christian pacifism took place. The main lecture was given by the Mennonite Pastor and church official Henry P. Krehbiel (1862–1940). His interpretation of history was demonstrably very important for the later events.

Krehbiel's thesis was that apart from the majority churches which were interlinked with the state and with the authorities there was also a church or fellowship of churches that had preserved the true Gospel throughout history. He quoted many examples from the Anabaptist-related tradition. Without a doubt his way of narrating history left a lasting effect on the participants of the conference, because he was then commissioned to prepare the following conference. On the invitation he used the expression 'Historic Peace Churches'. On the other hand, the expression 'pacifism' was deliberately avoided, as this was connected with modern liberal theology in the eyes of conservative members of the official churches and shunned by them.

Krehbiel opened the conference on 31st October 1935 with a programmatic address, in which he drew attention to the historical experiences of the three churches. They were formed from "old historic groups of disciples of Jesus [...] Generation after generation of our forbears [sic] have suffered persecution for their faith. Many became martyrs. They have been expatriated, have dwelt in wilderness and mountain retreats; have sought asylum in strange and unoccupied parts of the world, all that they might serve God in accord with the dictates of their consciences."

This quote puts the common history of suffering and the sturdy resilience of Christian life-style in profile, which appealed to a person's conscience as the criterion for contemporary co-operation. God has taken care of the 'friends of peace' throughout the centuries and prepared them for the new era now beginning. Therefore he pleaded for the co-operation of all historical peace groups in the USA and world-wide. The resolution that was passed at the conference was frequently re-published in later years.

The other person bearing responsibility for the conference and leading it was Harold S. Bender (1897–1962) from the Mennonite Goshen College. He is deemed to be the father of normative Anabaptist studies and it is his achievement to formulate the so-called 'Anabaptist Vision'. The original script of his speech is the basis for his interpretation of history and sketches out a picture of non-violent Anabaptism, which from the very start was rooted in a separatist, free-church ecclesiology. The Anabaptist movement advanced as a marginalised Reformation grouping. According to his theory it was actually the fulfilment of the Reformation.

By construing the *Historic Peace Churches* as co-operation between churches and the 'Anabaptist Vision' church history was made useful for the processes of identification for the Anabaptist-related denominations in the various phases of the 20th century. The Anabaptists became the role model for the witness for peace between the wars, but above all after the Second World War. An impressive testimony for this are the many humanitarian projects that were undertaken after the Second World War to rebuild Europe. The *Historic Peace Churches* emerged after 1945 as partners for Ecumenism because of their involvement in the peace movement. One example of this would be the Puidoux Conferences (1955–1962 and 1969), in which representatives of the regional Protestant churches, The international Fellowship of Reconciliation and the historical free churches discussed the relationship between the Christian testimony for peace and state authorities.

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Michael Haspel

We shall overcome ... The Role of Music in the Civil Rights Movement of the USA

One associates the Civil Rights Movement first of all with gospel songs and spirituals. But in the churches where Martin Luther King Junior was pastor no gospel songs were sung, because they were considered to be too populist in middle-class churches. Classical spirituals were the order of the day. As a whole jazz was probably the most widespread and potent music of protest.

In the background of Black music of the 1960s stood the musical tradition of spirituals and blues. The spirituals developed as a music style from African traditions and were inspired by Biblical motifs. These were based on the reaction to slavery, exploitation and oppression, above all in the south of the USA. They were traditional songs, sung in everyday life. There are no individual authors, the stress is on motifs from the Old Testament. By the stories about the liberation from Egypt of the enslaved people of Israel or the return from Babylonian exile they could draw direct parallels to the situation of the American slaves. They trusted that God would give them justice and set them free. (*Go down, Moses...*; *Swing low, sweet chariot...* are typical examples.)

The texts were often double coded. For the one part they embodied the specifically religious hope of freedom, but they also served as encrypted communication about escape plans – *Swing low* was such a communication.

I looked over Jordan and what did I see? A band of angels coming after me; Coming for to carry me home. That can be read as an allegory about death. It can also be understood in this way: on the other side of the river there are escape agents of the Underground Railway (a network to help escapees). Right from the beginning flight was the most effective form of resistance for slaves, whether through the woods or through the swamps. Indigenous people and former slaves formed their own kinds of society, sometimes with the help of the underground network of the northern abolitionist states.

Blues developed as an independent music form after slavery had been abolished, although for most of the black people in the southern states no actual improvement in their social and economic lot took place. Nevertheless, at least the possibility was opened for them to form their own organisations within certain limits.

Many independent black churches were founded. Also, cultural forms developed that went beyond the background of the plantations and social forms that Christianity had shaped up to that point. In that sense Blues is both the legacy of spirituals and in some ways their secularisation or at least a sign of decreasing religiosity.

(apl.) Prof. Dr. Michael Haspel
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rechts: Präsident Barack Obama, First Lady Michelle Obama, Vizepräsident Joe Biden und Dr. Jill Biden singen „We Shall Overcome“ während der Einweihung des Martin Luther King Jr. National Memorial in Washington, D.C., am Sonntag, den 16. Oktober 2011.

links: Mahalia Jackson, 1962



In the religious realm gospel music developed from blues and spirituals. It is more expressive and dynamic than spirituals. The songs are individual compositions and convey an evangelical, Christ-centred devotion. Spirituals are the soundtrack for the civil rights movement in the south of the USA in the 1950s and 1960s. Right from the first gathering in Montgomery (Alabama) and the protests in Birmingham to the Great March on Washington in 1963 it was these church songs that motivated people and coupled their religious stand with the protests. Mahalia Jackson was the iconic figure of this music. Martin Luther King Junior and Jackson were friends. When he was feeling depressed he rang her up and she sang a spiritual for him. During the march on Washington she said to him: *Martin, tell them about your dream.*



The famous passage was not even included in the original manuscript. At his funeral she sang: *Precious Lord, take my hand.*

Apart from the civil rights movement in the south of the USA, which was led in the main by the black churches, 'black' jazz may be considered to be the most popular protest music.

Free jazz emerged out of blues and was itself a protest against current conventions and circumstances. Actual events and experiences of violence and oppression were often reflected in this music. Jazz also offered the opportunity to create cultural identification for black people, as they were excluded from the majority culture. Beyond that the titles and/or the texts of jazz compositions made segregation and racism a direct subject of discussion. One early text by Billie Holiday

in 1939 clearly demonstrates this – 'Strange Fruit'. For a long while this song was not published, because it revealed lynching to be a form of continuing terror in the southern states. Max Roach, Charles Mingus and Archie Shepp among others also repeatedly seized on the subjects of violence and racism. But it must be said clearly that they often sympathised more with Malcolm X than with Martin Luther King Junior. MLK himself showed no particular affinity with jazz. In his home classical music and spirituals were predominant.

The music of the civil rights movement was genuine 'black' music. Nevertheless, it is apparent that when events did reach a 'white' public, at least in the media, protest singers from the folk music scene were also on the stage. On the march to Washington Bob Dylan, Peter, Paul and Mary, and Joan Baez performed as well. Peter, Paul and Mary and Joan Baez also took part in the final rally after the successful march from Selma to Montgomery on 24th March 1965. Obviously these folk singers, although protestors, were not part of black culture, but – as disseminated by the media – they still made an impact on how the civil rights movement was viewed and made an impression above all on 'white' liberal supporters. The soundtrack of the civil rights movement was multi-faceted.

The movement's uniting 'hymn', notable for its hybridity, was *We shall overcome*. It started life as a spiritual, was altered in the 1940s by the (black) protest movement and revamped by Pete Seeger. His version was popularised by Joan Baez and became the protest song of the civil rights movement and way beyond that.

Bernhard Thiessen

'War – Never again!' Peace and War in Socialist Dictatorships. Mennonites in the GDR

War – Never again! was the conviction of most Europeans after World War Two and its horrors were over. The World Council of Churches (WCC) proclaimed at its founding in Amsterdam (1948): *War should never happen according to God's will. Peace is the will of God!* – the historic peace churches (to which the Mennonites also belonged) reacted in 1953 and gave further clarification to the WCC based on their religious convictions..

With a dove of peace from Pablo Picasso, the famous artist and member of the French Communist Party (PCF), an invitation to the World Congress in Paris was extended to campaigners for peace. These peace doves became world famous and Picasso contributed a new motif to each Congress. The socialist GDR also adopted this Biblical symbol of peace (Genesis 8, 11). On posters, special locations, campaign placards and even on postage stamps the dove with an olive branch was visible in the GDR as a statement against war and the destruction it causes.

Co-workers and volunteers of the North American relief agency of the Mennonite Central Committee came over to Europe in the summer of 1945 to help the starving, uprooted people. They helped wherever necessary, irrespective of their personal faith and brought humanitarian assistance and made the case for a pacifist witness for peace. They offered courses and organised assignments for peace, reconciliation and against military service. For the Committee the peace dove with the olive branch was a central aspect of their self-identity.

How else can peace and *War – Never again!* be understood and safeguarded? Rearmament and the *Bundeswehr* (The Federal German armed forces) were introduced in the Federal Republic in 1956 and the GDR followed suit in the 1950s. There the East German Police, who had been quartered in barracks, and from 1962 the *People's National Army (NVA)* and later military education in kindergartens and schools sought to secure peace with the use of weapons. The Mennonite Central Committee and many Mennonites still refused to bear weapons. The Cold War on both sides of the Iron Curtain led to stigmatisation, war rhetoric and enemy stereotypes: the *capitalist fascists* on the one side, the *enslaved communists* and *oppressed Christians* on the other side. Mennonites refused to share this anti-communist and anti-capitalist propaganda. Instead they tried to build bridges and to promote reconciliation. Group trips to the GDR and other countries in the eastern bloc were organised, students and volunteers were sent at great expense to study on placements in the GDR or other countries within the Soviet bloc, or to take part in congresses held on the subject of peace in both east and west, despite the danger that secret service people might be sitting at the same table with them.

The intention was that the fellow-Christians in the east should receive the signal: *We have not forgotten you!* The message also told the official state organs that the Mennonite church of peace by no means thought in terms of enemy stereotypes but rather pursued the paths of reconciliation.

In the GDR itself there were Mennonites. They came after World War Two from East and West Prussia, having fled mostly with horse and cart and later settled in what was afterwards the Soviet military zone (SBZ, from 1949, the GDR). They belonged to those German Mennonites who in the 19th century had relinquished their privilege of conscientious objection as the Prussian State was founded. In World War One, but even more so in the Second World War they either served in unarmed roles in the army or were actively involved as soldiers in the war.

The picture was similar in the GDR. The uniform of a reserve officer shows clearly that even before the general mobilisation (in 1962) a few Mennonites served in the National People's Army (NVA). From 1964 it was possible to serve without weapons in the NVA as a 'construction soldier' (German: *Bausoldat*). Nevertheless this also meant having to suffer harassment and hindrances. At present no names of Mennonite 'construction soldiers' are known, but oral witnesses point to such individuals. The Mennonite church code left the matter to an individual's conscience whether to refuse to serve or to join the NVA. Walter Jantzen, a church elder, often signed statements for the State Secretary for Church Matters with the words: *Together for the mighty matter of peace*, but he was well aware that the GDR always understood that to mean 'armed peace'. The church had guest membership of the Christian Peace Conference (CFK, *Christliche Friedenskonferenz*), a section of the GDR authorities. This organisation was mostly active in the peace organisation of the countries of the Communist bloc, with close ties to the national states there. But through the influence of Mennonite theology a booklet was published in 1985 on the subject 'Pacifism'. In this, explicit reference was made

to the Mennonite World Conference (1984 in Strasbourg) and to the pacifism of the Mennonites and of other groups as a serious aspect of securing peace. In this way the Mennonite Central Committee and the small Mennonite church in the GDR (In 1989 there were 244 members) were able to offer a modest contribution to the peace discussions between East and West.

The peace politics of the GDR began in 1949 with a Biblical symbol, the peace dove. Curiously enough the armed politics of peace in 1989 stumbled over another Biblical symbol – 'Swords to Ploughshares' (Micah 4:3). In the GDR the vigorous and versatile oppositional movement for peace during the 1980s from both within and outside the church was ultimately part of the Peaceful Revolution that caused the fall of the Wall and the GDR.



DDR-Briefmarkenserie 1950, Sammlung: Bernhard Thiessen

MCC-LOGO 1947, MCCArch Akron, USA



Bernhard Thiessen
Pastor i.R., Mennonitengemeinde Berlin



Lesezeichen
Sammlung Reinhard Assmann

Reinhard Assmann

The School of Non-Violence in Army Uniform. The *Bausoldaten* (Construction Soldiers) in the GDR

Within the National People's Army in East Germany there was actually a legally recognised status which supported the furtherance of peace without the use of weapons, the so-called *Bausoldaten*. How was this possible?

During the Cold War both German states promoted re-armament. The Federal Republic joined NATO in 1955, founded the German Armed Forces and introduced conscription in 1956. In the GDR there were military units of the *Volkspolizei* (National Police Force) from 1952 and in 1956 the National People's Army (NVA) was formed. It was not until 1962, just after the Berlin Wall was built, that the Parliament of the GDR officially passed a law approving general conscription. In the Oath of Allegiance conscripts had to swear to be prepared at any time to defend socialism against all its enemies.

At first there were no protests against the introduction of conscription. But two Protestant bishops expressed doubts to the authorities about the Oath of Allegiance in March 1962 and requested a provision for conscientious objectors. They were unsuccessful.

In the following two years more than 1500 young men refused to do military service. This was mostly for religious reasons, although they were threatened with discrimination and prison. Even though this number was on average only 0.2% of each year's conscripts it was enough to cause alarm among the military leadership. On 7th September 1964 the National Defence Council ordered the formation of units of Construction Soldiers. These units were formed to deal with the demands of those refusing to do military service – no oath but a toned-down personal pledge. *Without these young citizens of the GDR, who were prepared to hold their heads up high, there would never have been the decree for the construction soldiers.* (Peter Schicketanz). Thanks to their courage the GDR was the only state in the eastern military alliance that permitted a non-combatant service without weapons.

These so-called *Bausoldaten* formed part of the NVA. The only difference was the uniform. They wore a small spade on their shoulder. Their deployment was organised in a military fashion and at first had mainly to do with military matters. For some of them this was an intolerable compromise. The result was bitter controversies and the refusal to obey orders. Some even became absolute objectors and accepted a prison sentence of two years.

During the 1970s the *Bausoldaten* were increasingly used 'behind the lines', in work such as cleaning or as caretakers in NVA installations. The improved conditions and growing freedom, but certainly the world-wide military confrontation soon led to a rapid increase in the number of *Bausoldaten*.



Bausoldaten-Schulterklappe

Andacht mit den Herrnhuter Losungen



Reinhard Assmann
Pastor i.R. im BEFG;
Historischer Beirat des BEFG

Bausoldaten-Anordnung



In the 1980s society experienced more and more political opposition, for example in the *Peace Circles*, although the militarisation of life in general was also on the increase. The composition of the *Bausoldaten* changed in the course of time. In 1983 more than half of them were motivated by political rather than religious considerations. *Bausoldaten* were increasingly involved in work for major industries, often in dire working conditions. Many of them were discontented and their protest turned into opposition. Only after the revolutionary events in the autumn of 1989 was a law passed by the *Volkskammer* (the Parliament of the GDR) on 20th February 1990 allowing an alternative, non-military service.

The young GDR in the 1950s linked its identity with strict anti-militarism. The clear pledge to peace was understood as a pledge of loyalty and was expected of its citizens. The GDR always believed it was a peace movement due to the menace emanating from the western military alliance. Its own weapons were, in its view, solely weapons for peace. This point of view was shared by many, including the CDU, (not the party in the Federal Republic, but one associated with the SED, the ruling party in the GDR), the *Christliche Friedenskonferenz*, (*Christian Peace Conference*) and also many long-serving representatives of the churches.

A minority of the *Bausoldaten* began to question this logic. By forming units of *construction soldiers* the GDR had, as it were, itself sown the seeds enabling the new peace movement to grow and prosper. The ceaseless military pressure and the confrontation that resulted proved to be the breeding-ground for solidarity among the *Bausoldaten*, for intensive discussions about the ethics of peace and for the courage necessary to argue logically and to act on what they believed.

Many *Bausoldaten* describe their time of service as a path out of their rejection of military service to a positive route to the service of peace, a training field for the non-violent pursuit of peace and often it was their home churches and ministers who offered advice and support.

In the words of Joachim Garstecki, the units of *Bausoldaten* 'were for many an exemplary experience in the attempt to create peace in the midst of organised conflict, to live a proper life in the middle of falsehood.'

Even the relatively large group of pietistic Christians among the *Bausoldaten* who nevertheless sought to strengthen their faith in that environment and who met secretly for spiritual encouragement discovered that the political questions were indeed relevant to their faith and became open to matters pertaining to peace ethics.

Many *Bausoldaten* were active in the peace movement and were fellow-founders of the *Neues Forum* (*New Forum*) and many similar groups. The historian Rainer Eckert states that they were one of the 'embryonic cells of the Peaceful Revolution'. But they never considered themselves to be heroes in any way. In fact, they did not even think they were part of the opposition. It was clear to them from the very start that their decision was a compromise. But by living in this stressful situation many of them learned to justify their witness for peace and to stand up boldly for it.

Vgl. dazu:

- *Zivilcourage und Kompromiss. Bausoldaten in der DDR 1964–1990*, Berlin 2006, 15, 31
- Bernd Eisenfeld/Peter Schicketanz: *Bausoldaten in der DDR. Die „Zusammenführung feindlich-negativer Kräfte“ in der NVA*, Berlin 2011
- Reinhard Assmann: „Friedenszeugnis ohne Gew(a)ehr“. *Die Bausoldaten als Teil der Friedensbewegung und der BEFG in der DDR*, in: *ZThG* 20 (2015), 228ff

Johannes Dyck

Non-resistance as a Conflict of Loyalties? Serving with Weapons in The Soviet Union as a Litmus Test



Mennonitische Sanitäter Heinrich Unruh, Riesen, Abram Töws 1915.

Quelle: Mennonitische Ansiedlung Neu Samara am Tock (1890–2003). Warendorf: 2003.

As the 20th century began the free churches in Russia held differing positions regarding non-resistance. Whereas it was part of their identity for the Mennonites, it was of no great relevance to the Baptists. These entered World War One as soldiers, but the Mennonites volunteered for the Red Cross in large numbers.

The major turning point was the Communist revolution in October 1917. In January 1919 the Soviet government issued a decree with respect to alternatives for military service. This was actively taken advantage of by conscientious objectors. They were represented by the United Association of religious fellowships and groups, who were led by Wladimir Tschertkow, a follower of Leo Tolstoi. The Association represented Baptists, *Evangeliumschrsten* ('Gospel Christians'), Mennonites, Seventh Day Adventists and the traditional fellowship of *Abstainers* (Tee-totallers).

Under the conditions of the civil war the Mennonites finally left their traditional position of non-resistance and organised their own armed self-protection, but this was unable to prevent several massacres. After the Communists took over order was restored. In 1920 a Mennonite conference condemned the use of weapons, but from then on the self-protection of the Russian-German Mennonites was rejected from all sides, both from Christians and from Soviet propagandists.

The goodwill of the Communist rulers soon came to an end. In September 1922 the leading *Evangeliumschrist* Ivan S. Prochanov directed his call to all Christians everywhere with an anti-militaristic appeal, *The Voice of the East*. As a result the secret service put him under great pressure and in June 1923 the *Supreme Council of the Evangeliumschrsten*, which he had been leading in an authoritarian fashion, recommended military service in the Red Army. This led to a split among the *Evangeliumschrsten*.

At this point the state made the rejection of non-violence the key indicator of loyalty. In 1923 the national congresses of the *Evangeliumschrsten* and the Baptists permitted the question of non-violence to be viewed as a personal decision of each believer. Only three years later both congresses declared that conscription was binding. Also in 1926 the Congress of the Pentecostal churches passed a similar resolution. The last church to succumb to state pressure was the Adventist church in 1928. For the free churches the decision had been made. The only group to stick to their traditional position was the Mennonites. They reaffirmed this in their All-Russian Conference in Moscow in 1925. Young men from this group were able to do non-military service until 1937.

Johannes Dyck

Wissenschaftlicher Mitarbeiter am Museum für russlanddeutsche Kulturgeschichte in Detmold



Taufe am Fluß Zhvanchyk im Dorf Rykhta. 1922

The resilience of the Mennonites had serious consequences. They were considered enemies of the state until 1966 and till then Mennonites were never officially counted as a state-approved church. In the confessions of faith drawn up after 1966 when the Mennonite churches were officially authorised there was no mention of non-violence at all.

The protestations of loyalty made by the free churches in the 1920s did not save them from being nearly completely eradicated by the state in the 1930s. The leadership of the Baptists was imprisoned for insufficient loyalty and the Union of Baptists was thus dissolved. When the war against Germany broke out in the summer of 1941 the two remaining leaders of the *Evangeliumschrsten* who had not been put in prison made an appeal for military service. In 1942 some survivors of the Union of Baptists supported this position. This led to a slow regeneration of Baptist work. Even during the war in 1944 the *All-Union Council of Evangeliumschrsten/Baptisten* was founded. This council also supported service in the Red Army in every respect and until the Soviet Union ceased to exist it was responsible for the officially recognised Pentecostals and Mennonites. Their official position included the rejection of non-violence. Only those who endorsed service with weapons could be ordained.

The official position of the All-Union Council did not always correspond to the fundamentalist biblicism of the local churches. It often happened that recruits refused to swear the military oath. This was the nearest they could get to non-violence. In some cases this resulted in imprisonment or much harsher conditions in their military service. The pressure on those refusing to swear the oath only decreased after 1972, when a 20-years old soldier from an underground Baptist church was tortured to death during his military service. This case aroused international attention. This incident brought much easing of the situation not just for Baptists but also for Mennonites and those of other confessions.

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Fernando Enns

The Pilgrim's Path to Justice and Peace

'Dear relation', this peculiar form of address I learned on the pilgrim's path to justice and peace. I like it. We were greeted this way during many encounters on 'Turtle Island', when we met various fellowships of the indigenous peoples last year. The word 'relation' tells us a lot about the traditional wisdom and attitude of these 'Communities'. Life is relationships and each of us is a part of life, interwoven in God's magnificent creation. For that reason trees, mountains, rivers and animals can be seen as 'relations'. Can there be a more valuable way of addressing each other in the world-wide ecumenical fellowship demonstrating respect for others, because we are reconciled through Christ.

The pilgrim's path of justice and peace has been the comprehensive programme of the World Council of Churches since the assembly in Busan, Korea in 2013 and has helped me on my spiritual journey during the last few years in maintaining my own personal stance. I have learnt a lot about myself, my church, other people and my own place in the many-faceted network of life. My thanks go out to all those local fellowships that have accompanied and welcomed us on this pilgrim journey through the world. The value of hospitality can be recognised when one is on a pilgrimage with empty hands but receives a warm welcome. Mostly this begins with a ritual. The place where the meeting takes place, whether on land or water, in a tent or in the open air, in a church, an office, a non-governmental organisation, a refugee camp, is blessed. God is given thanks for the safe journey of the guests, the special gift of this moment is recognised and a prayer is spoken for a beneficial time together.

In this way it becomes possible for everybody to feel accepted. That creates security and trust and our hearts are open to one another. A 'save space'. Besides the 'celebration of the gifts' there is also the possibility of a second dimension of our pilgrimage: 'touching wounds'. The communities on 'Turtle Island' live as so many others also live in our world-wide ecumenical fellowship, in precarious and exceptionally fragile circumstances. We summarised our experiences we made on the places we reached on our pilgrimage under four categories: (1) Country and expulsion, (2) Truth and trauma, (3) Gender equality, (4) Racism.

Global wounds are often described in abstract terms, but are directly experienced through injustice, economic, ecological or military violence. Sharing tears and sorrowing together is an essential aspect, because a necessary step on the path to justice and peace is recognising suffering. In the wounds (Greek: *traumata*) of the ecumenical relations Christ's wounds are present in our experience.

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The third dimension of this ecumenical movement is the experience 'transformation of Injustices'. From the 'save spaces' developed the will to form 'brave spaces' – areas of courage. These are necessary to prevent our pilgrimage from becoming an individual spiritual experience, instead of genuinely overcoming injustices and violence. Courageous Communities point the way and so encourage us as well to perceive and face up to our own hurts and also guilty entanglement in our relationships. That may well be uncomfortable because we then begin to take up the fight against 'powers and principalities', which are apparently unassailable.

As our attitude grows in strength and assurance we can become daring in working healing, because our experience as pilgrims proves to us we are already reconciled in the resurrected Christ, who has 'carried' our wounds and those of all our relations. We cannot tread the path of healing alone. Only when we truly become *com-pan-ieros* (those who share bread with each other on the path) with one another, we live out in a convincing way every healing – that is reconciliation – in Christ.

These experiences encouraged the delegates during the most recent full assembly of the WCC in Karlsruhe in 2022 to continue along the ecumenical path of pilgrimage as a path of 'justice, reconciliation and unity', which inspired the motto of the assembly: 'The Love of Christ Motivates, Reconciles and Unifies the World'. It is our hope that we are increasingly transformed to becoming more like our relation, Christ.



Laurent de La Hyre, *Der Kuss zwischen Friede und Gerechtigkeit*, 1654. Die Figur "Friede", die gerade die Waffen verbrennt, umarmt die Figur "Gerechtigkeit", während sie ein Schwert und eine Waage hält, in einer pastoralen Landschaft. Auf der Urne steht auf Lateinisch ein Hinweis auf Psalm 85, 11.

Konrad Raiser

The Peace Churches in the World Council of Churches

Besides the Mennonites other churches who also count as 'Peace Churches' are the Quakers (The Society of Friends) and the Church of the Brethren. Historically, they have different backgrounds, but are united by their separation from the territorial Protestant churches and their commitment to non-violence. Whereas the Church of the Brethren has belonged to the World Council of Churches (WCC) since 1948 this has only been the case for half of the Quakers and only for the Mennonite Federations of the Congo, Germany and the Netherlands.

There had been close contacts between the three peace churches since 1935 and after the founding of the WCC in Amsterdam (1948) these concentrated on the search for a credible ecumenical peace witness. The central question was, what theological, ethical and practical consequences can be drawn from the fundamental conviction, that according to God's will there should never be war. The pacifism of the peace churches was not received by the large churches in the WCC with much approval and sometimes with outright rejection. Between 1955 and 1962 four international consultations were held in Europe and encouraged mutual understanding. Nevertheless, the fundamental differences in the ethical judgement of the use of weapons to solve conflicts remained.

In the context of the plenary meeting of the WCC in Uppsala (1966) which initiated a campaign against racism there was a study *Violence, Freedom from Violence, and the Battle for Social Justice*. This was inspired by the memory of Martin Luther King and his non-violent mission to change society. This led to new interest in the consultations between the peace churches and the others in the WCC. There then followed a declaration during the next plenary meeting in Nairobi (1975) demanding that due to the increasing re-armament in the world the churches should stress their readiness to 'live without the protection of weapons'. Representatives of the peace churches also participated in the programme for *Militarism and Disarmament*, which was also agreed upon. That was the preparation for the plenary meeting in Vancouver (1983) that affirmed 'that both the production and deployment of nuclear weapons are a crime against humanity and as such must be condemned for ethical and theological reasons'.

Prof. Dr. Konrad Raiser
von 1992 bis Dezember 2003 Generalsekretär
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Thomas Pläßmann



This 'nuclear-pacifist' stance was strengthened by the appeal: *Christians should state categorically that they refuse to take part in a conflict, where weapons of mass destruction or other weapons are deployed, which randomly destroy everything.*

Having been reminded of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's suggestion in 1934 that a Council for Peace should be convened the plenary meeting in 1983 invoked a 'conciliar process for a mutual commitment (covenant) for justice, peace and for the integrity of creation'. In the course of this process a deeper exchange of standpoints between the peace churches and the other members of the WCC, especially in Europe and in the USA. This could also be observed on the local-church level. In the ecumenical assemblies in Dresden (1989), Basel (1989) and Seoul (1990) the contours of a new ecumenical testimony for peace became apparent. These are the most important ideas: the 'institution war' as a means of overcoming conflicts must be overcome, the traditional teaching of a 'just war' should be replaced by the teaching of a 'just peace', and the churches are under obligation to promote a culture of active and cordial rejection of violence.

In order to work out the details of this renewed ecumenical peace testimony in the following years the motto 'Overcoming Violence' was chosen. Donald Eugene Miller, at that time the General Secretary of the Church of the Brethren, convinced the Central Committee, which was still reluctant, that they should approve a programme for overcoming violence. This was in Johannesburg in 1994. In the beginning this programme concentrated on suitable initiatives in seven cities on the seven continents. The German Mennonite delegate Fernando Enns suggested in the plenary assembly in Harare in 1998 that this programme should be altered and carried forward in the form of a 'Decade for Overcoming Violence: Churches for Peace and Reconciliation' (2001–2010).

The peace churches answered this call for such a decade with a number of intensive consultations. The start was made in the Swiss Seminary in Bienenberg (2001) and further consultations took place in Africa (2004) and in Asia (2007). This was to acknowledge the experience of these churches in creating a peace culture. The momentum generated by the decade induced the WCC to produce a declaration of principles. This aimed at emphasising the sea-change in the ethical criteria in judging the issue of violence and the practical outworkings of the same. The resulting 'Call for a Just Peace' formed the basis for the Peace Convocation in Kingston, Jamaica (2011) and was endorsed by the plenary assembly in Busan (2013) in the declaration 'Path to a Just Peace'. That is one fruit of the consultations with the peace churches.

Thomas Nauerth

The Myth of Redeeming Violence

Remark to this essay:

This is an excerpt from a comprehensive paper; *How to Find Ways out of the Myth of Redeeming Violence. Pacifist Perspectives after Nine Months of War. This was held on 10th December 2022 in Berlin and documented by the Berlin Institute for State-Church-Research.* (institut@staat-kirche-forschung.de).

The expression 'myth of redeeming violence' was coined by the American theologian Walter Wink. He was looking for an answer to the question of how it is that we choose violent solutions, although we are not made for violence and as a rule we personally possess non-violent skills. Erasmus of Rotterdam wondered that human beings have no claws, fangs, armour, but are soft, vulnerable, communicative and needy, so why do we fight these wretched wars? Privately we make sure we are living non-violently, but on the other hand we are of the opinion that it is ultimately legitimate to use violence and killing as an effective means in decisions of foreign policy. Why do we think murder can be made use of in politics, when a state calls us to arms? Where does that idea come from that violence and killing can achieve lasting results? The longer we consider these questions, the more perplexed we are. The general sinfulness of man is by no means adequate as a reason as Lutherans and others often claim. The Dominican Franziskus Maria Stratmann wrote in the 1920s that there are so many attractive opportunities to sin, that the theory of violence and killing cannot be viewed as an unavoidable consequence of unavoidable sinfulness: The experienced priest uttered these words.

No, this fatal dilemma in which we are ensnared must have a different, psychological and cultural background. Walter Wink writes:

The myth of redeeming violence is the enduring myth of the modern world. [...] Oddly enough I noticed this the first time while watching a cartoon film for children [...]: An unconquerable hero is standing grimly before an unchanging and invincible villain. [...] But as if through a miracle the hero is set free, overcomes the villain and reinstates order.

The media has been fuelling the self-evident belief in violent killing as ultimate and legitimate has been growing from generation to generation. Wink believes that this conviction is the actual religion in our age, because, whatever we grasp when in great need or to whom we turn in such a situation, that is our God. So for Wink this is the real question of God:

The god of this myth is not the impartial ruler of all the nations, but a tribal god, who is worshipped as an idol. [...] His symbol is not the cross, but the pretence of a cross [...]. It does not offer forgiveness, but victory. [...] The myth [...] is idolatry. It is blasphemy. And it is immeasurably popular.

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The popularity of this myth is revealed at present in a depressing way. Putin's regime, the government in Kiev and the politicians of the rich western democracies with their 'democratic values', but also most of the media and the political scientists in every land share a common belief – it is occasionally legitimate and of course possible to solve conflicts with murderous military violence. In spite of disasters and blunders (Afghanistan!) a solution is still insanely hoped for through murderous military violence. If we are not successful in destroying this myth, it will plunge the world into complete destruction. A slight glimpse of hope is the fact that at least German military leaders have recently become more critical. In a workshop discussion of the Bavarian State Catholic Committee Lieutenant Colonel Ullrich Schäffer stated as if it were a matter of course that weapons cannot bring about peace. For the Lieutenant Colonel they can only open a 'window of opportunity', that politicians and diplomats must take advantage of. Ironically, the military are more sceptical of the myth of redeeming violence than politicians, journalists and bishops.

A major weakness in every military resistance and in every defence is seldom the subject of consideration because of this irrational trust in violence. One is fighting on the same level as the enemy. One uses the resources imposed on those fighting and acts according to the logic and practical constraints of these resources. The military forces are indifferent to these resources or to the rights and wrongs of one's actions and whether there are good reasons for them or not. What matters is simply if one can kill and destroy 'better' or more effectively than the enemy, because one's resources are more efficient.

There is a further issue in relation to the military resistance in Ukraine. It appears to be relatively aimless – one defends oneself, but what is the ultimate aim? In Kiev it was recently claimed that winning is the aim. It remains unclear what victory actually means. It is stated that the aggressor must be forced out of all the occupied territories. Whether that is really possible and what the

price would be should that happen, and above all, should the occupying power in fact be actually forced out, how would it then react – this is never even reflected on.

A military victory is only possible when the opposing warring party is prepared to accept a defeat. But when the adversary refuses to be defeated and has the possibility to escalate hostilities – and this is indeed possible because of the states that possess nuclear weapons – then can a military victory no longer be a reasonable objective due to such potential to escalate hostilities and to increase the amount of destruction, quite apart from the ethical questions.

Surely it is this myth of redeeming violence that the path of military defence is accepted as a fact, is followed unquestionably and receives such support, especially in view of the difficulties and paradoxes briefly mentioned here.

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Wolfgang Krauss

Michael Sattler: Prayer as Weapon and Resistance



Türkischer Soldat mit gefangenem Bauern.
Nach einem alten Flugblatt.

On 21st May 1527 Michael Sattler was burned to death outside Rottenburg, his fellow-Christians beheaded. His wife Margaretha was executed by drowning in the river Neckar. This verdict of the Catholic-Habsburg authorities was part of the massive persecution of the Anabaptist movement through both Catholic and Protestant leaders.

Sattler presented some challenges for his judges: 'When the Turks come they should never face resistance. The Word of God says in Matthew 5, 21; *You must not kill*. We should not offer resistance to the Turks or to any other enemies, but continue in prayer to God, that He may defend us and offer resistance.' He continued: 'If wars were justified, I would rather march against the so-called Christians who persecute, capture and kill genuine Christians, than against the Turks, because a Turk is a real Turk and knows nothing about the Christian faith. He is a Turk according to the flesh. You, on the other hand, boast of Christ, but persecute genuine witnesses to Christ – you are Turks according to the spirit.'

One judge demonstrated the reaction of the judges as they laughed and went into a huddle: 'Yes, you infamous, desperate villain ... should one really dispute with you? Indeed, it is the executioner who will dispute with you!'

The Ottoman advance threatened the 'Christian' West. Sattler believed there should be no military reply and only spiritual weapons could be used. Prayer would mobilise God and was the means of defence.

What would Sultan Suleiman II and his soldiers have felt about this massive rejection of violence and the millions of 'earnest prayers'? 'Christian' pamphlets described them as monsters and eschatological enemies of God, although they were only doing 'what Christian soldiers do'. It was the politics of power, merely dressed up as religion. It is also true that in those areas conquered by the Ottomans Christian churches could still exist, although they had to face a situation with restricted rights. In areas conquered by 'Christians' mosques had no chance.

Sattler's suggestion, not to fight against the Turks and 'other persecutors' put his judges in the same category as the Turks – as persecutors. These were 'Turks according to the flesh', whereas the judges were 'Turks according to the spirit'. If war were allowed he would rather fight with the Muslims against so-called Christians. An oddly paradoxical way of loving one's enemies. A letter from the emperor demanded the 'third baptism'. This was carried out on Sattler's wife: she was executed by drowning.

Wolfgang Krauß

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Who Was This Devout Troublemaker?

Sattler was born in Staufen (Breisgau), a town in the Habsburg Republic of Outer Austria and at the age of 15 entered the Benedictine Abbey of St. Peter in Freiburg, where he studied theology and philosophy, later becoming Prior there. There they discussed ideas emanating from the Reformation. He left the monastery to marry the ex-Beguine Margaretha. (Beguines were Catholic sisters, who did not belong to a Convent.) In Zürich they joined the Anabaptist movement, where he became one of their leaders. He took part in the Anabaptist conference in Schleithem on 24th February 1527. Soon afterwards he was arrested in Horb on the river Neckar.

His thoughts on the kingdom of God were radical and it may be assumed that his actual experiences of Christian discipleship and of the fellowship of the body of Christ began while he was a Benedictine monk. One Lutheran allegation was that the Anabaptists were 'a new sort of monks'. The rules of the Sermon on the Mount were supposed to be valid not merely for the monasteries, but for the whole church. Church and State should be separated. They formed autonomous fellowships without any influence from the state. So they were free to love their enemies.

The pattern for a church of brothers and sisters finds its classical form, which is most effective in churches that baptise believers, in Sattler's minutes of the meeting in Schleithem: *Brotherly Statement of Certain Children of God in Seven Articles*.

Article 2 understands 'separation' not as withdrawal from society, but distancing oneself from the state authorities: in 'obedience of faith' being 'united with God and doing his will'. This leads to the expectation that 'without doubt the unchristian, truly devilish weapons of violence become irrelevant, and sword, armour and such things no longer have any usefulness'. Non-violence results from the church having a completely different quality, which is an expression of its non-conformity. The Catholic theologian Gerhard Lohfink coined the phrase 'Church as contrast society' at the beginning of the 1980s.

Article 6 does recognise the 'sword' of the authorities as an ordering factor, but it has nothing to do with the 'perfection of Christ'. Christians' 'order' is love. The violent revenge of the state is not the task of Christians. International law does in fact legitimise the right of the state to self-defence, such as the right of Ukraine to defend itself against Russian aggression, but it is not part of the duties of Christians. A Mennonite pastor in Zaporizhia said on 20th May 2022 (the anniversary of Sattler's trial): 'We are fighting with other weapons.'

Dietrich Bonhoeffer declared in 1934 in front of an ecumenical audience in Fanø in Denmark: 'Battles are not won with weapons, but with God. They are won where the pathway leads to the Cross. Which of us may say that he knows what it could mean for the world, if a nation, instead of holding a weapon in its hand, in prayer and with no means of defence, would greet the aggressors with the only true weapons and arms?'

Bonhoeffer was executed on 9th April 1945 in the concentration camp of Flossenbürg – he was roughly the same age as Sattler, when he was executed.

In the meantime there have been numerous examples how nations in conflict have been successful without violence. Gandhi's nonviolent movement achieved the independence of India despite facing a world power. Candles and prayers in 1989 disarmed the People's Army in the GDR and brought down the Berlin Wall. Sattler would have stood on the side of those praying in every conflict.



Gedenktafel in Rottenburg/Neckar

Erich Geldbach

John Clifford and the Social Gospel



John Clifford,
Gemälde von John Collier (1850–1934)

When in 1905 the Baptist World Alliance was founded Dr John Clifford was elected as president.

Born into a working-class family in 1836 John Clifford had to leave school at the age of eleven and worked 16 hours daily in a lace-making factory, where he observed 'horrible things' in the working-conditions for people there. During his work he managed to find time to read books. He experienced his 'spiritual emancipation' in November 1850. He was baptised on 16th June 1851, which left such a good impression on him, that he celebrated this day every year by renewing his commitment to his work for God. In 1855 he preached his first sermon in a village chapel. After this he studied for two years and then was called by the Praed Street Baptist Church in London, but he only accepted the call on condition that he could continue his studies at London University. He continued working at this church, which grew from 130 to 1300 members. It changed its name later to Westbourne Park Baptist Church. In 1883 an American College awarded him an honorary doctorate. He died in 1923 while a member of the executive committee of the British Baptist Union.

His experiences in the factory made him conscious of how people are treated evilly, in order to increase profits. Greed makes people forget that working people have value in themselves, but exploitation of others is contrary to the spirit of the Gospel and the call of Christ. Appropriately Clifford was determined to save the soul and body of people in the precarious neighbourhood of his church. He did not turn away from the world, but drew near to others, in order to alleviate social ills and spiritual needs. 'Social Missionaries' – if possible, every church member should sow the Gospel of Christ by 'dissemination' [sic] and encourage more freedom and justice for everyone. An 'ethical culture' should develop.

Ultimately, his ideas led to socialism with neither 'revolution' nor 'dictatorship of the proletariat'. Similarly to Walter Rauschenbusch's Social Gospel this socialism should lead to democracy with social and individual freedom and justice. Workers, scientists, students, agnostics, faithful Christians and democrats are all called on to form an alliance against the reactionary Tories. This plurality of voices embodies for Clifford the sanity [sic] and catholicity [sic] of Christian socialism. If men and women are served and God's creatures receive help, then the third attribute is present – Christian socialism is essentially divine. [sic]

The uniqueness of Christian faith derives from the love of God to every person, from Christ's redeeming death for the sins of the world and the gift of the Holy Spirit, who convicts men and the world concerning sin and righteousness. God is His gift: the Biblical God offers Himself to men and women, He is His own gift. This 'renewal' is not just for men, as tradition teaches, but also for women and children. Clifford called this insight a 'revolutionary thought', that underlines the 'divinity' of Christian socialism. His role model is the original and pure faith of the 'Great Forty Years', the first four decades of church history. Through the incarnation God is anchored in actual history, for the world is not without God despite the chaos all around. His presence guarantees the development to 'the City of God'.

Clifford was politically and theologically a passionate democrat and was first involved with the Liberal Party and later with the Labour Party and against the Tories. His main concerns were:

- ▶ Equality for women against double morality
- ▶ Absolute solidarity and interdependence of man and nature
- ▶ Freedom and integrity for all and rejection of oppression
- ▶ Education against ignorance
- ▶ Healthy living conditions instead of sickness and drunkenness, which destroy body and soul
- ▶ Co-operation and profit-sharing against competition and greed.

Theologically he defended the congregationalist constitution which he believed was necessary to implement the unconditional sovereignty of Jesus Christ and was the expression of democratic Christianity [sic]. Among other consequences should be the successful surmounting of the schism between the General Baptists and the Particular Baptists.

Further achievements of his work:

He sought the unity of the non-conformist churches. This enabled the founding of the National Free Church Council in 1894. It was supported financially by the chocolate manufacturers George and Richard Cadbury. They were Quakers. In 1898 and 1899 Clifford was the president of the Council. He became a joint-founder of the World Council for Friendship between Churches. But he refused to take part in the ecumenical suggestions of the Anglican Church for an 'organic Union' on the basis of the 'Quadrilateral' (Holy Scripture, Apostolic Creed, Baptism/Holy Communion and Office of Bishop), because he was opposed to the episcopate. For that reason he also fought for the abolition of the House of Lords, because nobles and bishops can form policy without any democratic legitimacy. He wanted a 'spiritual democracy', to help people become disciples of Christ. An 'ecclesiasticism' [sic] based on the episcopate stands in the way, because it manages God's grace 'mechanically'. The Spirit, on the other hand, guides towards a more robust, stronger and more energetic form of democratic Christianity.

He categorically rejected state privileges for Anglican and Catholic schools. Instead he organised 'passive resistance' in favour of a partial tax boycott. This 'passive resistance' unfolded its full impact with Mahatma Gandhi, who had heard about Clifford's activities from the Baptist pastor J. J. Doke, who was a student of Clifford. Martin Luther King also stressed 'passive resistance' somewhat later.

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Katharina Jany

Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Letter to Mahatma Gandhi



Alfred Hrdlicka, Portrait Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1977) in Marl

The admiration I feel for your country, its philosophy and its leaders, for your personal accomplishments for the poorest people among your poor, for your educational ideals, for your advocacy of peace and non-violence, for truth and its power, has convinced me I should visit India in the coming winter.

Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote these words to Mahatma Gandhi on 17th October 1934. They only became public after Gandhi's papers were opened in New Delhi in 1919. His Indian biographer Ramachandra Guha quoted them and Professor Clifford Green from the USA made them available to the Bonhoeffer researchers. For the former bishop Wolfgang Huber, who translated the letter and published it in Germany, this is the most important new discovery of a document of Bonhoeffer since the 16 volumes of the official edition were published. Huber was surprised that Bonhoeffer did not refer in this letter to the question of non-violent resistance against the Hitler-regime, but instead considered how the deep spiritual crisis in Europe could be overcome:

It makes no sense to predict the future, because it lies in God's hand. But unless we are reading the signs incorrectly it all points towards a war in the near future and the next war will certainly result in the spiritual death of Europe. For that reason our countries need a spiritual and lively Christian peace movement. Western Christianity must be born anew in the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount. That is the decisive reason for my letter to you.

Somewhat later he added:

We have great theologians in Germany, who teach us afresh the central tenets of the Reformation – in my opinion the greatest of them all is Karl Barth. Happily I am his student and his friend. But none of them shows us the way to the practice of a new Christian life with no compromises and in complete accordance with the Sermon on the Mount. This is why I am asking you for help.

While working as an assistant clergyman in Barcelona (1928) Bonhoeffer had had intensive thoughts about Gandhi. At that time he had already considered visiting him. Huber believes however that the Sermon on the Mount only attained central importance for Bonhoeffer during his time studying in New York (1930–1931). During his regular visits to the Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem he recognised the intensity with which the black people experienced and celebrated their faith. He was impressed. It was there that Bonhoeffer intensified his Bible studies and realised that Jesus' Sermon on

the Mount was the mainspring of his preaching. The study of the Sermon on the Mount made him really a Christian, as he himself later claimed. Faith and action were for him a unity from that time onwards. After he returned to Germany he was involved in social and church-political activities besides his teaching work as a lecturer at the university in Berlin. In September 1931 he was elected in Cambridge to be one of the three youth secretaries of the International Congress for Friendship Work of the Churches (a precursor of the World Council of Churches). His confirmation classes in a working-class district of Berlin in 1931–1932 were combined with practical help – he gave the young people food, played chess and football with them and supported them financially. Together with Martin Niemöller and some others he founded the *Pfarrernotbund* (Emergency Covenant of Pastors), which later became the *Bekennende Kirche* (The Confessing Church). When Bonhoeffer accepted a pastorate abroad (in London in 1933) because he was disappointed in his own church, the Sermon on the Mount became even more the object of his own theological reflection. His plan to visit Gandhi became more specific at that time. Although based in London he took part in the draughting of the *Barmer Theologische Erklärung* (The Barmen Declaration) on 31st May 1934. As youth secretary he held his famous programmatic lecture at the international ecumenical conference in August 1934 in Fanø, where he appealed to the church's task for furthering peace:

What will peace be? [...] Only the one large ecumenical council [...] can express it in such a way that the reluctant world must hear the word of peace and the peoples be filled with joy, because this church of Christ removes the weapons from the hands of their sons in the name of Christ, forbids them to make war and proclaims the peace of Christ over the raging world.

A few weeks later he wrote a letter to Gandhi. Although Gandhi invited him in his brief reply, Bonhoeffer gave up his plan to travel to India. The *Confessing Church* requested he should take over the administration of the Preachers' Seminary in Finkenwalde. From 1935 he also lectured on the Sermon on the Mount at the University of Berlin. These lectures were published in 1937 in his book *Nachfolge* (The Cost of Discipleship).

From 1938 Bonhoeffer became associated with the military resistance against Hitler, which was seen as his abandoning the principles and the path of non-violence in the Sermon on the Mount. Wolfgang Huber contradicts this point of view and points to Bonhoeffer's writings on ethics. He reminds us that Bonhoeffer had always maintained the option of tyrannicide. In his 'ethics of responsibility' it is not just a question of the commandment not to kill, but also of preventing killing. From this perspective he quotes Bonhoeffer's well-known statement:

The ultimate responsibility is not how to heroically avoid this problem, but how a coming generation can survive. Only by answering this historical question of responsibility, can fruitful, albeit for a while humbling, solutions be found. It is much easier to stand up for a matter in principle than to do so responsibly in real life.

This essay is based on an interview with Wolfgang Huber on 24th September 2021.

The full text of the letter from Bonhoeffer with remarks by Wolfgang Huber can be viewed on the website [Keine Gewalt](http://www.keinegewalt.com). (2022).

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Ralf Dziewas

Martin Luther King's Non-violent Battle Against Racial Discrimination

Martin Luther King had just attained his PhD in theology in 1955 and had begun his first placement as pastor in the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama, when the strike against racial separation on the buses began there. King was elected chairman of the organisation committee. When the bus-strike was successfully ended after 358 days King had become an important representative of the civil rights movement, not just due to his presence in the media. His task was then to organise further steps to overcome the continuing racial segregation in other areas of society.

At first, King received personal protection but after a bomb attack on his life in 1956 he deliberately declined such protection, embraced pacifism and rejected the use of force to achieve political ends. Instead, he chose to practise 'Nonviolent-Direct-Actions', in other words, non-violent actions, but such that would actively lead to confrontation. The conscious sit-ins and breaches of the law was the intention of the demonstrations, in order to brand the evil of racial segregation in the eyes of the media as scandalous and to provoke the authorities to react to the protests with violence. But when the demonstrations, that had many young supporters as well as older members of the Afro-American churches, were broken up by force – water cannons and police dogs – this was filmed live on camera and was broadcast in the evening on the new medium TV and so could be seen immediately in many American households. The active but peaceful unmasking of an unjust system that could only be upheld by violence was for MLK the only possible and suitable strategy to gain sympathy from the nation as a whole, including the more liberal white population, for the Afro-Americans' fight in the southern states of the USA. In this way he wanted to force the national government and the public authorities to remove the legal framework for segregation and to establish equal rights.

To protect the non-violence of the actions the protestors were trained beforehand. They were taught not to fight back but to consciously accept police violence. They were also obliged to sign a pledge that they would reject violence. King was quite able to describe this group of fellow-protesters, trained in non-violence, in military terms:



Nachbau der Gefängniszelle von Martin Luther King im Nationalen Bürgerechtsmuseum in Memphis, Tennessee, USA

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We did not hesitate to call our movement an 'army', but an army of a particular kind. Our only armour is our sincerity, our uniform is resoluteness, our weapon is faith, our currency is our conscience. It was an army that was on the advance, but committed no evil, on the attack without faltering, an army that sang but did not kill. It was an army that tore down the bastions of hate, besieged the strongholds of segregation and encircled the symbols of discrimination. This army had sworn an oath of allegiance to God and its strategy and intelligence were characterised simply by their conscience.

It was this successful combination of consciously rejecting violence and actively fighting against injustice in order to overcome it that led to the award of the Nobel Peace Prize to Martin Luther King in 1964. MLK was in fact able to refer to role models for his strategy of Nonviolent-Direct-Actions. As a student he had considered Thoreau's thoughts on civil disobedience; Gandhi's non-violent struggle for India's liberty had also been a source of his inspiration. The civil rights movement could also point to practical experiences, because even before the American Civil War there had been a campaign to boycott racial segregation on trains in the state of Massachusetts in 1841. And in the first decades of the 20th century there had been a number of such protest actions against the deliberate disadvantaging and disenfranchising of the coloured segment of the population.



Martin Luther King Denkmal in Washington, USA

It was certainly MLK's particular achievement that as a visionary, and as a representative and an organiser of the diverse civil rights movement he could more or less enable this movement to follow and to put into practice his concept of active, nonviolent protest actions. His national popularity rested especially on his famous speech 'I have a dream' in 1963, but also on his constant travels and his presence on TV. Besides this, he profited from his appearances in interviews and talk shows as a man who stood for consistent nonviolent resistance in contrast to the more radical activists of the movement. But at the end of the 1960s when he demanded a strict nonviolent approach for international conflicts and uttered openly his critical attitude to the American political stance towards Vietnam his popularity sank rapidly among both the Afro-American community and the white population. Nevertheless, he stood unflinchingly to his personal conviction of nonviolence. In this way he became a symbolic figure for nonviolence after his murder by a white assassin in 1968. His thoughts inspire peaceful revolutionaries and civil rights campaigners all over the world up to the present day.

¹ King, *Verpflichtung zur Gewaltlosigkeit* (1963), in: *Mein Traum vom Ende des Hassens*, Herder 1994, S.57f

Gyburg Beschnidt

Jimmy Carter and his Peace Politics in the Conflict in the Near East



Carter, Sadat und Begin am 6. September 1978

Jimmy Carter (born 1924) was the President of the United States of America from 1977–1981. In interviews he often pointed out that during his time in office the USA was never involved in any actual wars. This was unique since World War Two. Even more important was how he sought peace in foreign affairs, especially in the Near East. This area of foreign policy was of great importance and the Near East a matter of real concern to him, because he had been a deacon and teacher in the Adult Sunday School of his Baptist church. He received the *Four Freedoms Award* from the Franklin and Eleanor Roosevelt Institute in 1995 and the *Human Rights Prize of the Baptist World Alliance*. In 2002 he was even presented with the Nobel Prize for Peace and above all for his humanitarian work after the end of his presidency. So his activities for peace and justice were recognised all over the world.

Two results from the peace progress in the near East were particularly important: the *Camp David Accords* (1978) and the *Peace Treaty* in 1979 between Israel and Egypt. In order to explain his position from that time he tried to relaunch the peace talks 30 years after his time as President by publishing a book: *Palestine Peace Not Apartheid* (2006). He wrote:

A system of apartheid, with two peoples occupying the same land but completely separated from each other, with Israelis totally dominant and suppressing violence by depriving Palestinians of their basic human rights.

The book provoked a lot of discussion, because Carter only briefly mentioned the Holocaust, whereas he stated in detail the violation of the human rights of the Palestinians. The former President apologised later for some of his statements, but nevertheless the book showed that US Americans can sometimes have a different perspective.

Here I offer a summary of the peace process: In September 1978 President Carter invited the Israeli President Menachem Begin and the Egyptian President Anwar el-Sadat with their delegations to Maryland in the USA. In Camp David, a vacation resort for US Presidents, they met for secret negotiations and spent twelve days of discussions in a peaceful atmosphere.



Anwar el-Sadat, Jimmy Carter und Menachem Begin treffen sich auf der Terrasse in Camp David.

Dr. Gyburg Beschnidt
Pastorin im Bund Evangelisch-Freikirchlicher Gemeinden

His intention was to normalise the relationship between Israel and Egypt, as they were still officially in a state of war since the Six-Day War (5th to 10th June 1967). The matters of dispute were the Golan Heights and the Sinai Peninsula as well as the right of existence and security of Israel. Carter tried to understand the needs and the interests of the parties involved. He used methods which are used nowadays in mediation practice. The position of the other party is represented in such a way that it feels understood. Besides, he often stressed at a later time that both sides needed an international community such as the UNO to watch over the peace process. After twelve days the results were as follows:

- ▶ - A peace treaty must contain a statement of mutual recognition.
- ▶ - Israel withdraws from the Sinai Peninsula.
- ▶ - Israel recognises 'the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people'.
- ▶ - The Gaza strip and the West Bank receive autonomous status for five years.
- ▶ - The Suez Canal is available to both sides.

Thus Egypt was the first Arabian state to recognise Israel and was immediately expelled from the Arab League, because it violated the League's Israel boycott. In 1994 Jordan followed Egypt's example and signed a peace treaty with Israel. Anwar el-Sadat paid a high personal price for this peace, because he was murdered two years later by Islamists. The leaders of the Soviet Union were of the opinion that they themselves had not been sufficiently involved. So this was not a peace that satisfied everyone.

This peace process was very close to Jimmy Carter's heart. His activities after his presidency demonstrate this, for example his book and his statements after the Iraq War (2003). It is not possible to confirm that he was conscious of the fact that peace was an important concern of the Anabaptists and early Baptists. As with the Anabaptists his point of view was not based on church traditions but on Biblical texts and theological conceptions. For this reason the chronology in his book begins with Abraham's journey from Ur to Canaan around 1900 BC and via Moses and David leads to the year 2006, the year when his book was published. He ignores events in Europe like the Holocaust and concentrates on those in the Near East. For Europeans this is disconcerting. But the conflict in the Near East was only one part of his foreign policy. He was also very concerned about China, South America and the Soviet Union. Nevertheless it may be said that peace was a central subject in his thoughts due to the tradition of his church and preoccupied him time and time again, above all in the area the Bible referred to so often.



Carter, Sadat, und Begin am 7 September 1978

Walter Dietrich und Moisés Mayordomo

Violence and War in the Old Testament

This essay contains extracts from a book *Gewalt und Gewaltüberwindung in der Bibel*, Zürich 2005, (*Violence and overcoming violence in the Bible*) by the Professor Emeritus for Old Testament Studies in Bern, Walter Dietrich, and Moisés Mayordomo, Professor for New Testament Studies in Basel.

If one asks the Bible questions on such a complicated subject as 'violence', then no easy answers or ultimate instructions can be expected. The Bible does not stipulate but stimulates, does not make unflappable but uneasy, does not supplant thought but provokes thought.

But with regard to the subject of violence opinions differ considerably. What is an adequate way of reading the Bible – blind apologetics, downplaying issues naively or scathing criticism? One thing is absolutely vital: the subject of violence is not something to be dispassionately examined as if under a microscope. Violence does not merely affect us; we are capable of committing violence, too. It touches us from outside but also simmers within us. Before we examine critically what the Bible says about violence and how it can be overcome, we should first make sure we do not naively judge and condemn Biblical texts. After all, each and every one of us has an enigmatic relationship to violence. (page 23)

The history of Israel in the Bible covers about 1000 years. During this long period Israel was involved in many wars. Whereas it was actively involved in some, in others war was forced upon the small people of Israel. It was surrounded by a large number of small peoples in Syria and Palestine and so was affected by the great centres of power on the Nile, the Euphrates and the Tigris. It lay on a landbridge, over which the small and the large armies passed in both directions. The central question for Israel was not so much if they could prevent this happening, but rather whether they should join in and, if so, whose side they should take.

Roughly speaking, the wars in the Bible are judged more positively, the earlier they took place in Biblical history. Whether we consider the destruction of the Egyptian chariots in the Red Sea (Exodus 14), the defeat of the Amalekites shortly afterwards (Exodus 17), the presumed violent conquest of Canaan (Joshua 1–12), or the repulsion of various enemies by the Judges and Saul, the first King, (Judges 3–16, I Samuel 11), there seems to be nowhere the slightest doubt about the legitimacy and necessity of these wars.

At the same time the violent conflicts which happened in the early period of Israel's history leave a bitter aftertaste. If this nation was born in the cradle of war, did it wish to return there time and time again? Is the Old Testament literature aimed at strengthening the combat spirit and military capability? Superficially this impression is quite possible, but then one would overlook the many explicit colour tones that have no military background whatsoever, when the Bible depicts war. By the crossing of the Red Sea the Egyptians were conquered, or rather drowned, but not by Israel's aggression or war strategy by God holding back the waters (Exodus 14) or in another version by means of wind. The Amalakitcs were indeed defeated, but less by Joshua's warriors than by Moses' uplifted arms (Exodus 17). Jericho's walls collapsed, not because of Israel's use of weapons to besiege the town, but due to the trumpets they blew (Joshua 6). The Canaanites were not defeated by Israel's troops but by the stones that fell from the sky (Joshua 10). [...] Gideon prevailed over the Midianites with just 300 soldiers, who merely made lots of noise and carried lights in the night, not with the whole Israelite army (Judges 7). [...] This kind of story is hardly suited to become part of a book for training soldiers. Readers are called to be awe-inspired and to honour a God who finds innumerable ways and means of protecting and saving His people when they are in acute distress. From these stories we learn that what matters is not the number of soldiers or the quality of the weapons; what ultimately decides victory and defeat is God's will to protect His people. (p. 82f.)

Being conscious of the tension between the fact that human beings have been granted great dignity and authority and that God remains the creator and universal ruler is an appropriate expression of a fundamental position, which is basic to every act that seeks to maintain peace and to inhibit violence. This fundamental position is characterised by the recognition that a person is conscious of his own 'honourable state' before God and that of his fellow men. He must be aware of injuries and restraints on this God-given dignity and of his own ability to act accordingly, although he knows that ability has its limitations, but must nevertheless seek to protect and maintain human dignity, where it is being trampled underfoot. (p. 151)

The God of Israel Rejects Violence

When one talks about renouncing violence, it is also necessary to refer to the God of Israel's rejection of violence, because He appears in some ways to offer the spiritual basis or at least the motivation for the figures in the Bible to reject violence themselves.

To reject violence is an ambiguous virtue for two reasons: firstly, because each of us is capable of using violence, when he or she feels it would be justified and would gain self-confidence and satisfaction from that; secondly, because the person one relieves, although he or she deserves to be punished, might in fact become more confident and even encouraged through the reticence and then cause more harm. Only a person who is willing to suffer violence himself can really renounce violence. The greatest champions of non-violence and non-violent resistance in the 20th century, Mahatma Gandhi and Martin Luther King, could not promise their followers that their opponents would react to non-violence with non-violence, which in fact was the case! Nonetheless, in both these cases non-violence won through eventually. The following Biblical examples demonstrate the same truth and also offer a potential way of overcoming violence.



Biblical prehistory presents many examples of God's renunciation of violence. [...] Cain, who murdered his brother, had to die, according to the sense of justice at that time, and feared he would be slain, but God gave him a sign to protect him from being murdered (Genesis 4). God disapproved of the Tower of Babel, but instead of using violence against its builders, he 'only' confused their language, so the building was never completed (Genesis 11). A full rejection of violence is what God confirmed after the Flood: *Never again will I destroy all living creatures, as I have done. As long as the earth endures, seedtime and harvest, cold and heat, summer and winter, day and night will never cease* (Genesis 8). The existence of God's creation is nothing else but the result of God renouncing violence. This decision is justified for the same reason that caused God to send the Flood: *... every inclination of man's heart is evil from childhood* (Genesis 6; 8). God could, indeed He should, react to man's wickedness, which is destroying the whole earth, with violence. He did so once, but will never repeat it. As a sign of this promise He set the rainbow in the clouds (Genesis 9). In this natural phenomenon the ancients saw the antitype of a feared weapon of war, but now it serves as a symbol that God has laid down the arms with which He could have fought against creation. By renouncing violence God takes into account that man's wickedness could again spread over all the earth, as it had done before the Flood. Thus He is prepared to suffer Himself. For, although the condition of the earth 'grieved' Him so much (Genesis 6), that He was willing to use violence, after the Flood the sad condition of the earth, though still unchanged, grieved Him just as much. God, who cannot (and will not) eradicate evil from creation is a fellow-sufferer with the sufferings of His creation in the midst of evil (p. 191f.).

Andreas Heiser

Conscientious Objection in the Ancient Church

Jesus confirmed in His preaching the principle of strict non-violence (Sermon on the Mount). Early Christians in consequence also rejected killing. For that reason the followers of the new religion took no part in the Jewish Wars (65–70, 132–135 AD).

The few pieces of information that we have from the first few years of the Christian era are ambivalent. The apologist Athenagoras can request the Christians in the second century to pray for the growth of the Roman Empire, which could not happen without the use of violence, whereas Minucius Felix in the second and third centuries in his *Octavius* denounced the barbarism of Rome's wars of conquest and in particular its embracing of heathen religion. Clement of Alexandria was ambivalent in his opinion. He viewed war as a gigantic evil, but praised the people of Israel in their exodus from Egypt as an example of a just war. We know from Tertullian that Christians did indeed serve in the Roman army or at least played their part in the defence of the Empire and its brave armies. He considered that war, with its huge number of victims, was a suitable way of dealing with what he believed was overpopulation. At the same time he rejected military service by Christians without compromise, because it is unimaginable that Christians could avoid killing others.

Origen compared Christians with heathen priests. These were also freed from military service. They had to bring their bloody sacrifices with pure hands. Similarly, it was the task of Christians to pray to God for justice and to pray for the lawful rulers. Prayer was a battle against demons who were the real authors of war, as was believed at that time.

Despite Origen's abhorrence of killing in bloody wars, Origen was not in principle an opponent of war in defence or of just wars. Although wars in his opinion were necessary, the total prohibition of killing barred Christians from taking part in wars. The priestly function of prayer was their task. They should intercede with God and do battle against demons. Even when the church was growing and had taken on more responsibility for the state, which included some Christians serving as soldiers, the total prohibition of killing remained the guideline by which to judge war.

Only after the 'Constantine Turning Point' was there a change in the attitude of Christians to war and military service. The victory of the Emperor at the Battle of the Milvian Bridge, as he turned to Christianity, led to a 'fusion' of war and Christ. The peace made between Christians and the Roman State made it impossible to refuse military service. The Synod of Arles in 314 pronounced a church ban on Christians who disposed of their weapons in times of peace. What was a general abhorrence of war and military service among the early Christians was turned into the prohibition of military service and of carrying weapons just for the clergy. This was justified by the law forbidding killing and the danger of moral compromise in the face of the atrocities of war. Contact with blood polluted the clergy and made them incapable of performing church 'rituals'.

A 'Christianisation' of war began with the integration of the church into the Roman Empire. Augustine (354–430), the bishop of Hippo Regius in what today is Algeria, cited four criteria necessary for a 'just' war: 1. The declaration of war must come from a legitimate authority. 2. There must be a justifiable reason for entering into war. 3. No other way of solving the conflict is available. 4. War must be fought in an appropriate way.



He believed that it is possible for Christians to do military service. To achieve this he separated the inner attitude of the soldier from his actions. As Augustine saw the top priority of military service in restoring peace, he could label war as an act of Christian love and therefore as a Christian action.

There were very few voices at that time that completely rejected war. In general, war was accepted as a necessary evil or even actively pursued, because it corresponded to God's plan of salvation.

Military Service – not an Ethical Question

The conflicts in the ancient church regarding military service were in essence not a question of ethics, but resulted from religious and cultic factors. This is demonstrated by those Christian soldiers who were martyred: they were not punished because they refused to kill but because they did not honour the gods. Military service was not a genuine problem for the early church. But later, when more Christians joined the army because of the advantages of being more secure in their society and of obtaining a better position in their lives, the theologians were taken by surprise.

The harshest criticism of military service by the early Christians was idol-worship which was considered to be very dangerous in the army. From the writings of the north African theologian Tertullian (*De corona* and *De idolatria*) we learn that Christians refused to swear an oath to the spirit of the Emperor when they entered the army. Besides that, they had to bear the wreath, which for Tertullian was the epitome of idolatry, and there was also the oath of allegiance to the flag and the cult of the legions' standards.

Minucius Felix strongly denied the accusation of their opponents, who were mixing up the facts when they ridiculed the Christians, reasoning that, since these worshipped the Cross, they might as well worship the standards. And although Origen assented to just wars, he too rejected the oath to the spirit of the Emperor.

Whereas simple Christian soldiers were able to stand passively when the cult sacrifices were made, after their promotion, for example to the rank of captain, they had to perform the rites themselves. On occasion they could have a substitute for this task. Others made the sign of the cross secretly, so as not to attract attention while taking part in the sacrifices. Others tried to avoid swearing the oath, because they were standing in the middle of a larger group of soldiers.

While the Christians in the earlier period rejected military service the situation changed from the 4th century, but it remained strictly forbidden for the clergy.

Military service for Christians was not an ethical but a religious problem. It can be proved that there were Christian soldiers in the armies of Diocletian, Maximian, Constantius and Maximinus. Ultimately, how these men dealt with the idolatry in the army remained their own, personal decision.

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Maren Schamp-Wiebe

Prayer for only one Nation? A Suggestion from Everyday School Life



Aktionen der Schülerinnen und Schüler,
um an den Frieden zu appellieren.

I have just returned from a service in the Mennonite church in Hamburg. There has been war in Europe for five weeks. Fear and worry are continually in our thoughts and prayers. Today we were praying for the refugees from Ukraine and for peace.

But over the past weeks I have noticed how the language about this war has governed my thoughts and in part has shocked me. The war is not just being fought on the battlefield, but in many other places as well – on the news channels, in social media and in carefully selected pictures. I feel very worried that some Christians do not communicate non-violently, although it is their task to carry the message of peace into the world.

The war was only three days old when Ukrainian flags were fluttering from roofs and in gardens. Society rolled up its sleeves and houses were opened to offer shelter to Ukrainians. Some churches and other public buildings were lit up at night in blue and yellow. Christian social work posted *#pray for ukraine* through an extensive fund-raising campaign that was set in motion by the state Protestant churches. When I saw the slogan for the first time I felt uneasy. I should pray for a country or for a whole nation. Of course the Ukrainians are in the front line of suffering, since they are losing dear ones, their homeland and their freedom.

But what about the Russian soldiers who have been sent to the Ukraine under false pretences and told to shoot at people who speak a similar language, sing the same songs and have close ties historically and culturally with them. Who cares about the mothers and fathers, wives and children of these Russian soldiers as they too live in fear and worry about their loved ones. In our neighbourhood there are Russian men and women. What must they think, as they walk past a church, which is inviting people to pray for Ukraine.

A Russian girl in my school stopped going to school in the first days of the war out of shame or out of fear of intimidation. When she returned to school we could talk with the children in the class and discussed with them how everybody longs for a peaceful life and most people were against this war. The girl wrote the Russian word *MIR* next to the Turkish *Baris* and *pace*, that an Italian girl had written on a large flag that had been hoisted on the school gate. As I see it, this call to PRAY FOR UKRAINE is an example of communication that is not non-violent. It draws distinctions, makes a one-sided political statement and confirms that one side is in the role of the victim. I would rather see calls like 'PRAY for PEACE', or 'We are Praying for Peace'.

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Horst Sebastian

Conscientious Objection Promoting Peace as Disciples of Jesus Christ

The church father Hippolytus of Rome unambiguously demanded of converted Roman soldiers in the third century that they refuse every command to kill. This shows that in the kerygma of the young Christian church Jesus' message of love and peace was being proclaimed, which was incompatible with the call to violent and warlike action that would lead to people being killed. It was a call to conscientious objection. This unequivocal position was abandoned after the 'Constantine Turning Point' and the imperial church.

A broad and comprehensive theological discussion was launched concerning the right way to understand Jesus' peace ethics. On the one hand was the pacifistic point of view regarding non-violence and on the other hand stood the search for ways of discerning between legitimate and illegitimate violence.

The state decides both whether and in what form military service should be done. There are various possibilities: doing military service, receiving the status of a non-combatant, or doing an alternative service. At present, conscription is suspended in Germany.

Apart from these options a state can call up its citizens to serve. For example, the Ukraine has suspended the exemption for smaller religious fellowships, like Jehovah's Witnesses and Seventh-Day Adventists. Should a person refuse to serve for reasons of conscience he must expect to be sentenced to prison. Much courage is required to live with the consequences of treading the path of non-violence in such a case and the conscientious objector becomes a martyr for Christ's message of love and peace.

I want to outline three perspectives in which especially Christian conscientious objectors become peacemakers for Jesus.

Dr. Horst Sebastian

Beauftragter der Siebenten-Tags-Adventisten
für Kriegsdienstverweigerer



Friedenskuss-Darstellung auf Schloss Friedenstein, 1650:
Friede ernehret, Unfriede verzehret

no obligation, nor any honour in killing someone or to die as a soldier oneself. Conscientious objectors reject every violent deed, as they destroy, humiliate and are contemptuous of human life.

Civil Disobedience

The Christian view of man and the decision to reject violence does not mean lethargy and weakness. Conscientious objectors are a thorn in the flesh of a world characterised by militarism and violence and which will never lead to peace. Military success is not the same as peace. Conscientious objectors point to Jesus who never let Himself be used to promote war. He lived in a deeply divided society. It was normal that people were encouraged to resist the Roman usurpers. His civil disobedience was a message of love, of forgiveness and of the coming of God's Kingdom. That is already present in Jesus' message of peace which is brave enough to accept opposition. That includes opposition to commands from the authorities. Also, the message of God's Kingdom is not yet fulfilled. Peace is and remains an eschatological hope and only in God's consummation will it find fulfilment. That is why conscientious objectors as disciples of Christ choose different ways of facing conflicts, violence and war. Their basis remains the conviction that every person, created in the image of God, must be respected.

Conscientious objectors are peace-makers. Their point of view causes conflicts and resistance from state authorities and is derided by a violent world. But exactly at that point they proclaim peace which transcends all understanding (Philippians 4, 7).

The Conception of Man

Man as *imago dei* (the image of God) entails respect for life, for all things living as the highest value (Albert Schweitzer). This view of man was demonstrated in the life of Jesus and knows no violence against other people but is striving for salvation and reconciliation through the power of God. There are no exceptions and no group is excluded. If people shoot each other and attempt to murder others this contradicts the recognition that every person is made in the image of God. Jesus' respect of all things living includes loving one's enemies. An enemy is also God's creature and the answer to enmity and aggression ought to be to hold others in high regard and to love them. It must be emphasised: People are not cannon fodder, nor 'collateral damage'. Therefore, the conscientious objectors by following their conscience put into practice Jesus' own view of human life. He refused to destroy the lives of His fellow-human beings and their integrity. On the contrary, He healed and protected life that was under threat.

Violence

The theologian Walter Wink wrote in his book 'The Powers That Be' that it is a myth that violence can redeem and save: *The greatest weakness of violence is that it leads to a downward spiral which destroys what it actually wants to create.* When we observe the military conflicts in our age the spiral of violence and counter-violence has not led to peace – quite on the contrary. That is why Christians are told *not to repay anyone evil with evil* (Romans 12, 17) and to obey Jesus' words *not to resist an evil person.* (Matthew 5, 39) If we go along with Jesus' message regarding non-violence, then there is no reason,

Carsten Claussen

Bible Study on The Letter to the Romans, Chapter 13

Let every person be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except by God. Does Romans 13:1 legitimise state power uncritically? Rulers and others in power have in the course of church history believed all too quickly that they knew what that statement means and above all the consequences for their subjects. It is all too tempting to legitimise one's own power by claiming God's authority. From the time Christianity became the state religion in the 4th century through to the combination of colonialism and mission of later times a comprehensive historical problem becomes obvious here. What Romans 13:1 really means can only be discerned by reading the passage to the end.

The Question of Taxes and Tolls

The passage closes in verse 7 with the injunction to pay the taxes and levies to the state and indeed to treat the state system with respect and honour. Behind this is Jesus' statement (Mark 12:17): *Render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's and to God the things that are God's.* This is Jesus' reply to the critical and devious question of the Pharisees, who asked if it was correct to pay taxes. The Pharisees did not regard the Roman occupation force as legitimate rulers over Jerusalem and Palestine. The early Christians often had difficulties in recognising the *Imperium Romanum* and fulfilling their obligations. In order to understand why St Paul acknowledged the 'authorities' the historical background is of decisive importance. What had the early Christians, including Paul himself, experienced?

Negative Experiences of the Early Christians in an Unjust Empire

For the recipients of the Letter to the Romans the Edict of Claudius (Caesar from 41 to 54 AD) was surely still a painful memory. Due to the supposed riots Jewish Christians were expelled from Rome in 49 AD. Priscilla and Aquila also belonged to those expelled (Acts of the Apostles 18:2). The Roman state recognised no right to religious freedom. The religions of the subjects were permitted as long as everything remained calm. But those people who worshipped a Messiah, who had been executed under a Roman Prefect, clearly gave their heathen neighbours and the state authorities reason enough to be suspicious. Repressive measures such as their expulsion destroyed the trust of these Christians in the 'authorities'.

So how can one with a clear conscience support such a state financially by taxes and other levies? How can one respect and honour Caesar and his government? Priscilla and Aquila had returned to Rome. A church met in their house (Romans 16:3–5). Perhaps these questions were discussed in their weekly meetings. St Paul was alarmed. Would the Christians in Rome refuse to pay taxes and to obey the state? That could utterly destroy the churches and their members. Caution was the order of the day. But surely the description of the Roman 'authorities' as 'established by God' (Verse 1) and even as 'God's servant' (Verse 4) went too far? What experiences had Paul had which led him to such a positive assessment?

Positive Experiences with the Roman Authorities?

What do the Acts of the Apostles say to this? Two things are of importance here. Firstly, Paul's activities took place in the time of the *Pax Romana*, which Caesar Augustus had founded in 27 AD. The Roman Empire had an extensive network of roads and by sea many coastal towns could be safely reached. Stability and a peaceful Empire were of inestimable value for the missionary journeys of the Apostle of the heathen and for the spread of early Christianity.

Secondly, as Paul possessed Roman citizenship he had the possibility of referring a judicial case to Caesar. He took advantage of this (see Acts 22:25–29; 25:10–12; 28:19). The High Priest accused him before the Proconsul Felix in Caesarea and claimed he had *found this man to be a troublemaker, stirring up riots among the Jews all over the world. He is a ringleader of the Nazarene sect.* (Acts 24:5). The Apostle enjoyed protection through his citizenship. That way he avoided being sent back to Jerusalem which would have put his life in danger (Acts 25:3).

Paul's Violent Death

The Acts of the Apostles remains silent about how Paul's life ended after two years under house arrest in Rome. (But compare Acts 20:25,38). It is presumed he was executed during Nero's Christian persecution in 64 AD. If viewed from the perspective of his death as a martyr Paul might have had a more critical verdict on the state authorities. Where they did not act as 'God's servant', but with unbridled wickedness (compare Revelation 13:1ff.) then the Apostle Peter's declaration in front of the Jewish High Council would be appropriate: *We must obey God rather than men.* (Acts 5:29) Nevertheless Paul was clear about the limits of worldly power and distinguished without equivocation between the wisdom of 'the rulers of this world' and 'the wisdom of God' (I Corinthians 2:6ff.).

The Call for Freedom and Our Responsibility in the Present

This background helps us to understand why Paul's appraisal of 'authority' in Romans 13 is positive. An uncritical assumption that his statements would be just as valid in later times and in different political circumstances is unwise. The Church Father Tertullian demanded religious freedom (*libertas religionis*) for the first time in the second century AD, but it was still a long time till it received recognition under international law. In many countries freedom of religion is still under threat and even rejected. Liberal and constitutional democracies offer their citizens many kinds of protection, but these need other and more suitable conditions than people had in the *Imperium Romanum*. If we wish to make St Paul's words in Romans 13:1–7 relevant for the present, the question must always be asked, how others can be served through the love of God in a state with its political system (Romans 13:8). All Christians are called and challenged to be God's active spokesmen and spokeswomen as His servants in this world.

Questions for Discussion

- ▶ What did the Roman state expect of its citizens? What were the expectations that Christians in the early times found particularly difficult?
- ▶ To what extent was St Paul's perception of the Roman state influenced by his Roman citizenship? Why did he insist on his case being judged by the highest authorities of the Roman Empire?
- ▶ What other voices are there in the New Testament and in church history regarding the relationship between church and state?

Questions to Deepen our Understanding

- ▶ What does a modern democracy in a liberal state expect from its citizens?
- ▶ What does religious freedom mean for Christians and for those of other religions or for those who have no religious affiliation or connections at all? Are there consequences for the practice of religion in a secular state, for religious majorities or religious minorities?
- ▶ What countries endanger the lives of Christians who follow their religion, or at least set limits to them? How can we support them?

Valentin de Boulogne,
Paulus schreibt Briefe,
1618-1620



Prof. Dr. Carsten Claussen
Prof. für das NT an der Theologischen
Hochschule des BEFG in Elstal

Ilia Osephanshvili

The Peace Project of the Peace-Cathedral

When you visit the Peace-Cathedral of the Evangelical Baptist Church of Georgia in Tbilisi (aka Tiflis) you will notice two doors behind the altar. One door leads to the Peace-Synagogue and the other to the Peace-Mosque.

It is a project for peace that promotes dialogue, friendship and co-operation between the Abrahamic religions. It took five years to build the Peace-Synagogue and the Peace-Mosque and while writing this (in the summer of 2022) the final tasks are being completed. The slow speed of construction was due to the fact that only Muslims could pay for the Synagogue and only Jews for the Mosque. The Peace Project was supervised by the Baptist Bishop, the term used in Georgia, Malkhaz Songulashvili.

The Peace Cathedral often hosts pan-ecumenical meetings and is actively involved in the inter-religious dialogue. This is important, not just for Georgia but also for the whole region. Rabbis and Imams take part in the cathedral services. The presence of these religious leaders is an inspiration for Christians, Jews and Muslims, because religion should serve peace and human well-being, whatever a person's ethnic, religious or any other identity.



Bischof Ilia Osephashvili
Bischof der Evangelisch-Baptistischen Kirche
von Georgien,
Leiter der Peace Academy in Tbilisi

The peace project has three principal aims: Education, Pilgrimage and Co-operation with regard to social justice and protecting human dignity. Above the Peace-Mosque is a centre for inter-religious dialogue and a library, which has already been completed. The library is available to everyone who is interested. As in the Peace-Cathedral, courses and conferences are also held in the Peace-Synagogue and the Peace-Mosque. The intention is to advance knowledge in the Abrahamic religions and to draw them closer together. Christians, Jews and Muslims have the opportunity to pray together or according to their own traditions and to bring to fruition the spirit of peace through friendship and a good working relationship. The Peace-Cathedral, together with the Peace-Synagogue and Peace-Mosque, is intended to be a home for the Abrahamic religions (and for other religions, as well). In this place hospitality, friendship and co-operation are to hold sway.

The modern world is full of hostility, hate and intolerance. In our land, Georgia, there have often been religious confrontations. Under these circumstances it is an essential part of our Christian mission to be active in inter-religious dialogue and to build bridges of peace between the Abrahamic religions.



Die Bilder zeigen die miteinander durch Türen verbundenen Friedens-Kathedrale der Evangelisch-Baptistischen Kirche, die Friedens-Synagoge und die Friedens-Moschee in Georgien

Annette Nauerth

International Fellowship of Reconciliation

The International Fellowship of Reconciliation (www.versoehnungsbund.de) is an association of men and women who are committed to non-violence because of their religious faith or their fundamental humanistic attitude. Their life-principle is to strive for personal, social and political transformation. It was founded between 1914 and 1919 by Christians in the spirit of the Sermon on the Mount and today it unites members from other religions and those without any religious ties as well as Christians. On every continent and in almost every west European country there are national 'branches' of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation (www.ifor.org). The organisation has consultative status with the United Nations. The Fellowship of Reconciliation was also instrumental in founding many other organisations and initiatives for justice and peace, such as: *War Resisters International* (www.wri-irg.org); *Service Civil International* (www.sci-d.de); *Eirene* (www.eirene.de); *Church and Peace* (www.church-and-peace.org); *Peace Brigades International* (www.pbideutschland.de); *Bund für Soziale Verteidigung* (www.soziale-verteidigung.de); *Forum Ziviler Friedensdienst* (www.forumzfd.de); *Ökumenisches Institut für Friedenstheologie* (www.oekem-institut-friedenstheologie.de).

The Fellowship of Reconciliation sees itself as an organisation existing for the sake of its members. It can only pay a few full-time workers. Its real work is that done by its members on the ground, locally, regionally, and that work in different areas to promote a comprehensive culture of non-violence. It works through non-violent education (courses, workshops, lectures and publications), through non-violent resistance against all violence that results in killing others (conscientious objection, elimination of nuclear arms and in general disarmament, working towards environmental justice etc.), through solidarity with non-violent initiatives all over the world for justice, peace and conserving creation (eg. Israel and Palestine), and through encouraging non-violent alternatives, (Lebenshaus, exchange platforms, Fair Trade shops etc.).

Creating opportunities to help people to live in freedom. It could be called a revolution for life!



Katharina Jany

Jean Goss and Hildegard Goss-Mayr



Jean Goss und Hildegard Goss-Mayr
Quelle: Hildegard Goss-Mayr



Hildegard Goss-Mayr mit Reinhard Assmann und Katharina Jany in der Ausstellung „Keine Gewalt“ beim Ökumenischen Kirchentag in München 2010

Hildegard Mayr (born in Austria in 1930) and the Frenchman Jean Goss (1912–1991) were deeply rooted in the Catholic faith. Mayr is the daughter of Kaspar Mayr who was a founder member of the Austrian branch of the International Fellowship of Reconciliation, which was the first ecumenical peace organisation and was founded in 1914. Jean Goss had fought against the German occupiers in Lille in the Second World War, so had carried arms:

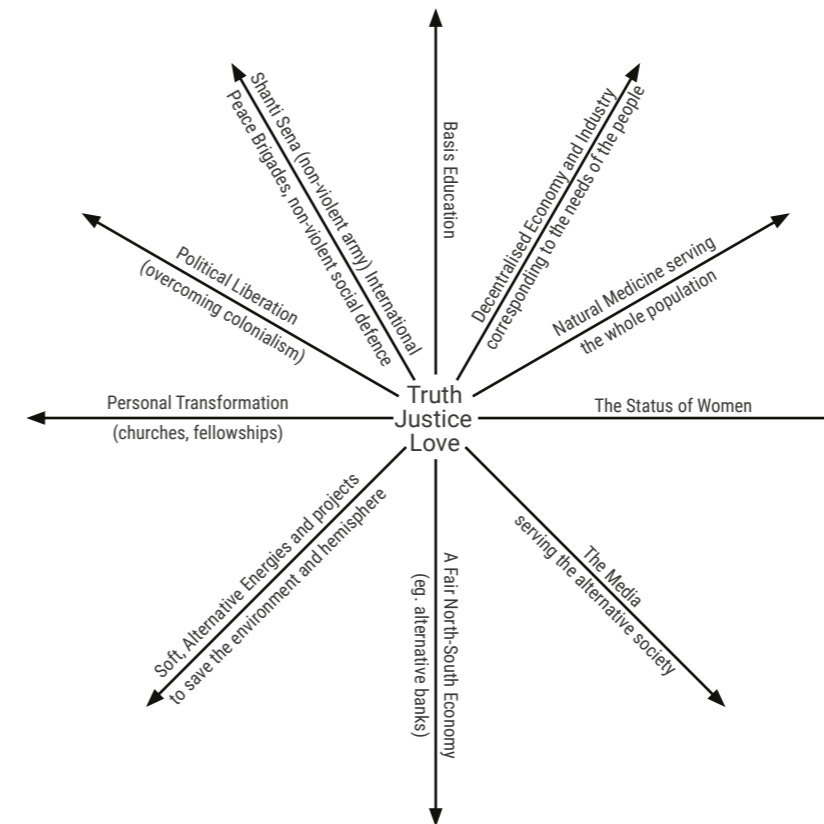
I was so good at killing that I was soon highly decorated. But I quickly realised that I was not killing Hitler or one of his generals. The Germans I was killing were young men, workers like myself, farmers, fathers, ordinary people.

On the night before Easter 1940, just before he became a prisoner of war in Germany, Jean Goss had a mystical experience, which changed his life. From that moment it was impossible for him to continue killing. His great love for others, friend or enemy, turned him into a pacifist. He experienced the ‘revolutionary power’ of love deep within, which changes people for the better. He read the Gospels with new eyes and found in them confirmation of his experience. It caused him pain that the Roman Catholic Church was silent about rearmament after the end of the war and did not position itself explicitly against war. He took his concern right into the Vatican. Through contact with Henri Roser, a minister of the Reformed Church, he came to the Fellowship of Reconciliation and met Hildegard Mayr and they married in 1958. She was his companion, sharing his belief in the power of love (the ‘Power for Good’). As she had a PhD in social studies she developed the theoretical basis for their common vision and also a methodology for non-violent action.

The couple travelled to many crisis regions on behalf of the Fellowship of Reconciliation. They were in Latin America, the Philippines, Lebanon, Africa in order to teach the protest movements in those regions the spirituality and practice of nonviolent resistance. Until the beginning of the 1960s they were both involved in the dialogue between East and West. When the ‘Servicio Paz y Justicia’ (SERPAJ) was founded they were involved as well as in the ‘Rosary Revolution’ against the regime of President Marcos in the Philippines. After the death of her husband in 1991 Hildegard Goss-Mayr continued the work, mostly in Africa. She was twice nominated for the Nobel Peace Prize and received the Niwano Peace Prize in 1991.

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Berlin-Prenzlauer Berg

¹ Hildegard Goss-Mayr:
Wie Feinde Freunde werden, Wien 2008, 26.



Quellen und Darstellung aus:
Hildegard Goss-Mayr/Jean Goss, Evangelium
und Ringen um den Frieden, Wien 1995.

QUELLE

Hildegard Goss-Mayr – The Alternative and Constructive Programme

The concept of active involvement in non-violence in order to enable more justice and dignity in life has been seriously neglected. Since there are no alternatives we have often realised that steps forward that have already been reached in the fight for non-violence are lost again and violence has returned. It is not enough to overcome violence; authentic, realistic alternatives have to be found that can help the victims in their situation.

In the battle against injustice we need to find alternatives for our own lives, for the lives of those in our group and in our movement. The ‘Basis Churches’ in Latin America give us an important example. The oppressed discover their dignity and the truth within themselves. They learn to defend their ravaged justice in a non-violent and persistent battle, and they learn even more: How to lay the cornerstones for a new society. They are trained to take social and political responsibility, to share and serve on every level, to form associations and to design models for a new and better kind of politics, and many other things besides.

QUELLE

Jean Goss – About Civil Disobedience

This is the ultimate, last weapon of non-violence, the hardest and strongest one that makes all dictators shiver, because they are only strong under one condition: that we obey!

Civil disobedience is nothing but collective and unorganised disobedience towards unjust laws and commands, because such laws show no respect to human beings. When a nation takes up the weapon of non-violence and uses it – together with discipline and respect for others, which might even lead to the love that is prepared to lose one’s own life – then no dictatorship can withstand it. That is impossible! We have already seen that a dictator, like all of us, is just a poor little thing. But if we fear him we are prepared to carry out anything he says, even monstrous commands. A dictator is only almighty, because we have laid aside our human dignity. In the moment we refuse to obey, a dictator is lost.

On Our Own Behalf

The Travelling Exhibition Daring! 500 Years Anabaptist Movement (1525–2025)



In memory of the Anabaptists a travelling exhibition was created. Eight display-boards convey information on the history of the Anabaptists and each 'Daring – Theme of the Year' is augmented by two biographies. The questions appended to the themes are an invitation to reflect and to discuss.

The exhibition can be displayed in church or in secular rooms, at church, ecumenical or communal events, in educational courses or large-scale events. It is especially suitable for school groups to visit church premises in the course of Religion and History lessons (from about the age of twelve upwards).



The exhibition can be loaned out from:

Bund Evangelisch-Freikirchlicher Gemeinden
Johann-Gerhard-Oncken-Str. 7, 14641 Wustermark
Germany

Contact Person: Ms Katrin Neubert

Email: taeuferausstellung@befg.de

Further Information:

www.taeuferbewegung2025.de/materialsammlung/wanderausstellung

The pictures show the travelling exhibition at the General Assembly of the World Council of Churches in summer 2022 in the city of Karlsruhe (Germany). Both the German and the English versions of the exhibition can be seen in the pictures.



The Theme Years:

2020: *daring! living responsibly*

Baptism – Voluntariness – Religious Freedom

2021: *daring! living together*

Equality – Responsibility – Autonomy

2022: *daring! living consistently*

Orientation on Jesus – Nonconformity – Confession of Faith – Martyrdom

2023: *daring! living non-violently*

Church of Peace – Resistance – Reconciliation

2024: *daring! living in hope*

The Kingdom of God – Utopia – Renewal

2025: *Anniversary celebration*

In 2025, commemorative events will take place, jointly organized by various institutions and networks of Anabaptist churches (including Mennonite World Conference, Baptist World Alliance).



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