

THE CHRISTIAN WITNESS TO PEACE IN THE TIME OF THE COLD WAR

A Case Study in the Contemporary History of the Evangelical Church of the Union*

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I The Twofold Notion of Peace and Brotherhood

The topic I wish to present is the Christian witness to peace. It seems only natural that considering this issue we come across two biblical passages. One is from the letter to the Ephesians which says that “he [Christ himself] is our peace”, since “in his flesh he has made both groups into one and has broken down the dividing wall, that is, the hostility between us” (Eph 2:14 NRSV). The other passage I have in mind opens the Psalm 133: “Behold, how good and how pleasant for brethren to dwell together in unity” (Ps 133:1 KJB).

Either passage evokes a certain image or concept of peace: are they equivalent, or do they denote different aspects of

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peace, perhaps struggling or even excluding each other? This question is not easy to answer. At first sight it might seem that living together in unity (Ps 133:1) is the same thing as being made into one by the abolition of dividing walls (Eph 2:14), but at a closer look things get complicated. Ephesians describes peace as being integrated into one and the same household such as a city or a family, but if we consider what the biblical writings tell us about brotherhood of Jacob and Esau, it is obvious that even such close relationships can differ from peace in the true sense of its meaning. There are occasions when living together as brothers is not yet fully peace, but only a form of coexistence without open hostilities. In return, even this example from family life illustrates that *sometimes peacebuilding does not start by abolishing dividing walls, but, quite the opposite, by dividing inimical siblings!* Ephesians clearly goes beyond this preliminary peace, but its images and concepts do not – unless we consider Christ himself for the image of peace. But how can Christology help Christians bear witness to peace? This is precisely the methodological problem we are faced with when considering the issue of a Christian witness to peace. We can summarize this in a thesis:

Thesis #1:

The methodological problem of a theological peace ethics is that the biblical notion of peace as *unity in Christ* (Eph 2:14) goes beyond a political *coexistence of inimical siblings* (Ps 133:1), but its imagery (abolition of dividing walls) does not. Therefore the main question is how peace as unity in Christ relates to peaceful brotherhood.

II Ecclesial Structures of Brotherhood in Germany during the Cold War

A similar problem occurs when we turn from the middle of 1st to the middle of the 20th century CE, when Europe was split in half by the Iron Curtain between the NATO and the Warsaw Treaty countries. Here the term the Cold War denotes a situation where armed hostilities of a real war are absent,

but so is peace that goes beyond an armistice. The role which a Christian witness can play in such a situation has recently been studied in both contemporary historical¹ and theological² research, and my following remarks are meant to contribute to this research. The term the Cold War in my understanding covers the period from 1945 to 1990, but will concentrate on a stage after the geopolitical change which the so-called policy of détente has brought about since the middle 1960s, when various negotiations between the confronting political systems were taken up. At least in Germany this change of policy was to a remarkable extent accompanied by an ecclesial debate that went back to the early post-war period.³ The influence this debate has had on the social democratic government who carried out the new policy in West Germany is most obvious in an official ecclesial memorandum from 1965 whose authors

¹ Modern historian Katharina Kunter focuses on the attitudes and relationships which different church bodies on a national or international level entertain with the political structures and events of the Cold War, cf. e.g. Katharina Kunter, *The Churches in the CSCE Process 1968–1978*, Stuttgart 2000 (Confession and Society, vol. 20); Katharina Kunter, *Hopes Fulfilled and Dreams Shattered. Evangelical Churches in Germany Between Democracy and Socialism (1980–1993)*, Göttingen 2006 (Studies in Contemporary Church History, Ser. B, vol. 46).

² Recent studies include: Martin Greschat, *Protestantism in the Cold War: Church, Politics, and Society in a Divided Germany 1945–1963* (Paderborn: andenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010); Claudia Lepp, “Taboo of Unity? The East-Western Community of the Protestant Christians and the Division of Germany (1945–1989)”, *Studies in Contemporary Church History, ser. B, vol. 42* (Göttingen: n. publ., 2005); Gerhard Besier, Armin Boyens/Gerhard Lindemann, “National Protestantism and Ecumenical Movement. Ecclesial Activities in the Cold War (1945–1990)”, *Contemporary Historical Research 3* (Berlin: n. publ., 1999).

³ Among the most important documents are the so-called *Stuttgart Confession of Guilt* (an address of the ECG Council to representatives of worldwide ecumenism) from Oct. 19, 1945 (= Church Yearbook 72–75 [1945–48] 26f., http://www.ekd.de/bekenntnisse/stuttgarter_schulderklaerung.html, accessed 28.09.2011) and the so-called *Darmstadt Word* “On the Political Way of Our People” (issued by the ECG Council of Brethren) from Aug. 8, 1947 (= Church Yearbook 72–75 [1945–48] 220–222, http://cms.reformiert-ronsdorf.de/attachments/111_Darmstädter_Wort.pdf, accessed 28.09.2011)

from either part of Germany insinuated that the acceptance of a post-war Eastern frontier to Poland was an act of reconciliation and a precondition for peace in Europe.⁴

In return, the political changes have had their corollaries for the churches, too. Shortly after the new GDR constitution (1968) and its still quite restrictive attitude towards the churches, the Eastern German Federation of Evangelical Churches (FEC) was founded in 1969 and eventually recognized by the socialist state although the new ecclesial motto of a “Church in Socialism” (FEC Synod in 1972) made an implicit claim for a social mandate of the church which the GDR state officials rightly suspected might some day threaten the real existing socialism.⁵ At any rate, after 1969 the Evangelical Church in Germany (ECG) was practically restricted to West Germany, although the Eastern Federation (FEC) claimed a “special community” with the West German protestant churches and immediately took up rather loose consultations with the Church Leading Boards from the West.⁶ Many scholars, however, agree that churches in East Germany did not profit from the change in policy until a face-to-face meeting their leaders had with Erich Honecker in 1978, some years after the Act of Helsinki

⁴ On the Situation of the Displaced and on the Relation of the German People to its Neighbours in the East, a memorandum of the ECG Council, in: Memoranda of the ECG, vol. I/1, Gütersloh 1978, 77–126 (<http://www.ekd.de/EKD-Texte/45952.html>, accessed 28. 09. 2011). In its concluding section (VI) on the Eastern Borders of Germany, the memorandum argues very cautiously by advising the political leaders not to insist on certain rights which appear granted in the Western world (123–126). The background of this advice is that the preceding section (V) argues for inserting elements of “reconciliation” into political discourse about rights (122).

⁵ This claim was made explicit by Heino Falcke’s influential lecture “Christ frees – therefore Church for Others” (Vote on Barmen II, 213–232) which considered socialism “improvable” – an attitude which was strictly refused by the GDR state officials who dealt with the Regional Synod of the ECU-East in 1974 (cf. Winter, ECU and GDR, 270).

⁶ Cf. Anke Silomon, “Claim and Reality of a ‘Peculiar Community’. The East-Western Dialogue of the German Evangelical Churches 1969–1991”, *Studies in Contemporary Church History*, ser. B, vol. 45 (Göttingen: n. publ., 2006).

(1975) – one of the most important political results of the détente process which guaranteed among others stable frontiers and human rights in all signatory countries, including the GDR.⁷

Christoph Kleßmann has argued that the existence of two Protestant church federations on the national level (ECG, FEC) in times of détente parallels with the political conviction of one nation in two states – and thus shares its eventual success in national unity.⁸ This interpretation seems helpful because it widens the horizon for a theological evaluation of these events. My impression, however, is that the real test case is not the national church communities, but *the Evangelical Church of the Union* (ECU), a smaller church community comprising the United churches from the Prussian era. For unlike the national federations, this community was able to hold up the institution of a common West-Eastern board of church leaders (Joint Councils) who met every month for common consultation even if their decisions needed negotiation and approval by the Regional Synods and Council Sections on

⁷ Cf. Armin Boyens, "Talk in a Showcase. The Summit Meeting between Honecker and the Evangelical Church Leaders of the GDR on March 6, 1978", in *Contemporary Church History*, vol. 7, (1994), 209–235, and Gerhard Besier, "The SUP (Socialist Unity Party) State and the Church 1969–1990", *The Vision of a "Third Way"* (Berlin: n. publ., 1995), 65–119 on the one hand and *The Summit Talk on March 6, 1978 – a Stroke of Luck or a Fall of Man? 20 Years After the Conversation between the Executive Committee of the Conference of Evangelical Church Leading Boards and the President of the GDR State Council*, ed. by the Society for the Promotion of Comparative State-Church Research, Berlin 1998 (Series of the Institute for Comparative State-Church Research, vol. 5) on the other. The latter publication views these events in their immediate historical context, whereas Besier and Boyens consider them in the framework of an evaluation of the different societal and political systems in West and East Germany.

⁸ Christoph Kleßmann, "Protestant Churches and National Identity in a Divided Germany", in *Contemporary Church History*, vol. 12 (n. pl.: n. publ., 1999), 441–458. Kleßmann's view as an historian who works on the German *political history* is very helpful to mitigate the divergent opinions *church historians* hold about these events (cf. the previous footnote).

either side of the Iron Curtain, the ECU-West and the ECU-East.⁹ Moreover, the ECU has been a united church reconciling Lutheran and Reformed traditions which requires an implicit ecclesiological notion of peace. Therefore I think that the history of the ECU is paradigmatic for the role a Christian peace witness has played since the détente stage of the Cold War.

III The Issue of Peace in the Evangelical Church of the Union

The most important theological achievement of the ECU is probably the eight-volume commentary on all six theses of the Theological Declaration of Barmen (Barmen I-VI), which the Theological Board of the ECU (both West and East) published between 1974 and 1999.¹⁰ Initially this impressive project was just a case study in Barmen II, but this study established an influential interpretation of the entire Declaration by creating a link between the first and the third thesis, i.e., between the basis and the “axis” of the entire declaration, as later Bishop

⁹ Reference literature on this topic includes Friedrich Winter, *The Evangelical Church of the Union and the German Democratic Republic. Effects and Relations*, Bielefeld 2001 (Union and Confession 22).

¹⁰ Cf. *On the Political Mandate of the Christian Congregation* (Barmen II), *Vote of the Theological Board of the ECU*, ed. by Alfred Burgsmüller, Gütersloh 1974 (Separate Print of the Vote, Gütersloh 1975). – *The Church as “Community of Brethren”* (Barmen III), ed. by Alfred Burgsmüller, 2 vols. (Lectures and Vote of the Theological Board of the ECU), Gütersloh 1980/81. – *To Care for Right and Peace. The Mandate of the Church and the Task of the State According to Barmen V. Theological Vote of the ECU-West*, ed. by Wilhelm Hüffmeier, Gütersloh 1986. – *God’s One Word: A Message For All* (Barmen I and VI), ed. by Wilhelm Hüffmeier, 2 vols. (Lectures and Vote of the Theological Board of the ECU), Gütersloh 1993/94. – *The Service of the Entire Congregation of Jesus Christ and the Problem of Dominion* (Barmen IV), ed. by Joachim Ochel, 2 vols. (Lectures and Vote of the Theological Board of the ECU), Gütersloh 1999. (In what follows, I will quote these volumes as “Vote” resp. “Lectures” on Barmen [I to VI].)

Wolfgang Huber characterised the third thesis.¹¹ This leads me to my second thesis:

Thesis #2: The Theological Board of the ECU has established an influential interpretation of their central doctrinal document (Theological Declaration of Barmen, 1934) by striving for a social ethics of brotherhood (Barmen III) that is grounded in the exclusive claim of Christology (Barmen I and II).

The study's basic interest, as pointed out by the chairman of the Theological Board Walter Kreck, was to provide a "*Christological foundation for a political ethics*" according to the first thesis¹² while emphasizing *social structures* as the object of such ethics according to the third thesis¹³ which stresses the social nature of the church as a "community of brethren" (Barmen III). The link between the Christological and the structural argument was borrowed from a paper by the board member Hans-Georg Geyer and stated a twofold concept of totality: While Christ as the one Word of God (Barmen I) demands the believer's total life (Barmen II), the totality which political entities (like a state) may demand is of a different nature.¹⁴ This *structural difference between spiritual and*

¹¹ Wolfgang Huber, The Actuality of the Theological Declaration of Barmen, in: *ibid.*, Consequences of Christian Freedom. Ethics and Church Theory in the Horizon of the Theological Declaration of Barmen, Neukirchen-Vluyn 1983 (Neukirchen Contributions to Systematic Theology 4), 23–30, here 28.

¹² The quotation is from the study itself (Vote on Barmen II [Separate Print 1975], 12), but cf. also Kreck's preface (7).

¹³ E.g. Vote on Barmen II (Separate Print 1975), 18.

¹⁴ This important argument is also on p. 18 of the Vote on Barmen II (Separate Print 1975). Hans-Georg Geyer, Some Preliminary Reflections on the Necessity and Possibility of a Political Ethics in Protestant Theology, in: Vote on Barmen II, 172–212, sketches a similar argument when reflecting the tension between the "exclusivity" and the "universality" of the Christian faith (184) that is expressed by Barth's social ethical metaphor of spiritual and political community as concentric circles (177f.).

political totality requires a theological distinction between just and unjust structures in society. Therefore, the memorandum focuses on the social nature of the Christian belief and the “political mandate” it constitutes for the church. It is peculiar of this study that its quest for just social structures allows for or even requires *different political mandates for Western and Eastern contexts respectively*. At the same time this peculiarity is a disadvantage, because it turned out very soon that even the board members who wrote the study did not agree on the political consequences.

This lack of unanimity is a serious problem which paves the way of the Board’s further work during the Cold War. Already this first Barmen study had to be published together with the divergent opinion of one of the board members from West Germany, Erich Dinkler.¹⁵ Moreover, the Eastern Regional Synod, whose members were encouraged by the socialist government,¹⁶ preferred not to publish the Vote immediately, but circulate particularly its practical recommendations among the congregations.¹⁷

¹⁵ Cf. Vote on Barmen II (Spearate Print 1975), 44–66 for a) Dinkler’s minority vote, b) the response of the majority, and c) Dinkler’s defense of his minority vote.

¹⁶ On the contemporary circumstances cf. Winter, ECU and GDR, 267–271, esp. 268 with fn. 169.

¹⁷ It is interesting that while the Joint Councils envisaged to “print” the study in West Germany, they only considered to “duplicate” it for East Germany (Archive of the PEC, C 10310, vol. II, 5/73 verso). The unpublished minutes of the 14th Consultation of the Eastern Council Section on October 3, 1973 say (under the headline: “Work of the Theological Board of the ECU”) that “the vote materially deals with topics from the Commission for the [sc. United-Lutheran] Discourse on Doctrine. [The Commission], however, investigates the issue of witness in the GDR more thoroughly than the Theological Board does. It has to be considered what a complicated situation would arise if the paper [i.e. Vote on Barmen II] was edited without the Lutherans and the Board for ‘Church and Society’. [...] the work of the Theological Board should not be kept in filing cabinets, but its use requires very careful consideration.” (Archive of the PEC, C 10310, vol. II, 4/73) These sentences shed a new light on the resolution the Eastern Council Section took that same day, emphasizing

Things got even worse with the sequel study on Barmen III. It was originally meant to encourage brotherly community in the church, since the preceding study thought this was missing in German Protestantism.¹⁸ However, when the study was released after five years of work, the synodal resolution and unpublished minutes of the Council consultations indicated that the Eastern Region of the ECU considered it “insufficiently differentiated”¹⁹ to be of *practical value in the ecclesial situation of the GDR*.²⁰ The West German synodal resolution, on the other hand, demonstrates that the Western member churches

“especially” the need for “consultation with the United Evangelical-Lutheran Church in the GDR” (Vote on Barmen II [Separate Print 1975] 4): The more or less *formal argument of confessional equity* between the United and the Lutheran churches can be interpreted as a *disguise for substantial doubts about the practical use of the study*. The 11th Joint Consultation of both Council Sections (also on October 3, 1973) seems to confirm this interpretation in respect to the churches in the GDR: “Section IV B [of the vote, i.e. the recommendations for the GDR] is not tailored for the pastor’s desk, but for conversation among the members of the congregation. IV B must not yet be published in the FRG. The paper must be spread to folks here [= in the GDR] first. The entire thing should go out, but IV B with many copies more [than the rest of the study].” (Archive of the PEC, C 10310, vol. II, 5/73 recte)

¹⁸ Vote on Barmen II (Separate Print 1975), 10 (in the analysis of the ecclesial and theological situation in West Germany): “What should have been realized by the entire ‘community of brethren’ (Barmen III), was left to the ‘official’ church [...]”.

¹⁹ The Resolution of the Eastern Regional Synod from May 18, 1980 says openly: “The analysis of the situation of the churches in the GDR appears insufficiently differentiated” (Vote on Barmen III, 17).

²⁰ Together with the Resolution from the previous footnote the Synod took another one concerning future projects for the Theological Board. Such projects, the synod advised, should be “thematically narrower and more scheduled in the short run” (Archive of the PEC, C 10303, vol. IX, 7/80, transfer A 110.18/80) Two years before, when the study in Barmen III was the main topic of the synodal consultations, substantial pleas against the draft of the study had been articulated, dealing in particular with the overcomplex outline of the study. It was then that the idea of a brochure as reading aid originated (Archive of the PEC, C 10303, vol. IX, 9/78). When the Western Regional Synod in 1980 approved the study, they made a similar suggestion in their resolution which eventually succeeded.

were mainly concerned with the *worldwide challenges* in ecclesiology and thus favoured a *comprehensive reflection* on the church²¹ over its local activities. Of course, such a divergence between the West and the East could have contributed to a differentiated statement like in the study on Barmen II, had there not been a fundamental disagreement on the key concept of brotherly community in the background of this divergence. While the unpublished minutes of the preparative consultations of the *Eastern Synod* (1978) document clearly stated that the "community of brethren" was here understood as a *church internal community* like in the *Johannine writings* of the New Testament,²² the *West German* attitude is represented by the influential lecture Wolfgang Huber gave before the Theological Board in 1977, favouring a *wide interpretation of brotherhood* like in the *Matthean parable of the Last Judgment*.²³

The additional interpretation which Kreck, the chairman of the Board, suggested failed to reconcile the divergent understandings of the "community of brethren". Kreck argued that Christian communities could not draw basically different social and political conclusions from one and the same gospel and thus applied the notion of brotherhood to the two sections of the ECU themselves. However, he did so only after resigning from his position as the chairman and even leaving the Board

²¹ The lengthy Resolution (Vote on Barmen III, 18f.) deals extensively with every single of the nine recommendations that the study gives.

²² During the Eastern Regional Synod in 1978 an appointed committee dealt with the draft of the study and formulated four pages of "remarks", no. 5 explains the phrase "community of brethren" merely in ecclesiological respect: "Brotherhood should be spoken of in a more concrete way. Brothers ought to be disclosed as a Christ-given help to faith and as a limitation for living out one's humanity. How does brotherhood relate to distance, to an ordering of the community in which there are different, also hierarchical ministries, to the diversity of decisions and shapes of spirituality, to democratic ways of behaviour (fraternity), to the Lutheran concept of the [ecclesial] office?" (Archive of the PEC, vol. IX, 11/78, p. 3) The single reference (in no. 4.3.) to the "brother in need", who might be outside the church, does not balance this strictly ecclesiological understanding of brotherhood. (Archive of the PEC, vol. IX, 11/78, p. 3)

²³ Cf. Lectures on Barmen III, 269f.

altogether,²⁴ which indicates that there was no majority in the Board (neither Western nor Eastern) for his proposal to consider ecclesial brotherhood as a community over the political fence. As Kreck revealed in a literary debate with Helmut Gollwitzer in 1978, that he understood (so did the ECU on Barmen III) the “community of brethren” in terms of the “political mandate” of the church (so the ECU on Barmen II) ???, since the topics he suggested for practising this brotherly community were clearly political, above all the issue of nuclear disarmament.²⁵ Like Gollwitzer, Kreck thought that intellectual exchange with Marxist science and ideology was necessary for a common West-Eastern Christian statement on disarmament. And it was most probably this thrust for an ideological exchange across the Iron Curtain that Kreck could not convince the Board members of, so he resigned.

If we consider this early stage of the theological work of the ECU, the overall image is very ambiguous, as my third thesis propounds:

Thesis #3: Due to the divergent *semantics* of brotherhood as

- either church-internal (ECU-East, relying on the Johannean writings)
- or worldwide bonds (ECU-West, relying on Matth 25:31-46),

the Regional ECU Synods failed to take a Resolution for a Christian peace witness until they realized the *pragmatic* impact which the notion of a “community of brethren” (Barmen III) had on their own ecclesial relation to the world. This seems to have taken place for the first time in Eberhard Natho’s Account of Presidency in the Regional Synod of the ECU-East in 1980.

²⁴ Kreck’s excursus on the “Community of Brethren or Structures of Power?” in his *Basic Issues in Ecclesiology*, Munich 1981, 196 quotes from the letter Kreck had written in January 1978 to inform the Joint Council about his withdrawal (partially published in Martin Stiewe, *The History of the Interpretation of the Theological Declaration of Barmen by the Theological Board of the ECU*, in: *Lectures on Barmen IV*, 150-175, here 161).

²⁵ Walter Kreck, *Church and Church Organisation. Questions to Helmut Gollwitzer’s Theses about the Church*, in: *Evangelical Theology*, vol. 38 (1978), 518-526, here 526.

The basic theological aim of Christological foundation for a political ethics is very ambitious and so is the claim for ecclesial brotherhood. Given that these aims were realized, the position of the Theological Board would offer an excellent basis for a Christian witness to peace in the Cold War, since in a theological perspective, the issue of peace would definitely have to deal with structures of brotherhood (like in Ps 133:1) that are grounded in Christology (like in Eph 2:14). Unfortunately, it seems that the Theological Board was unable to keep up these high standards even among their own members. Kreck's failure in his advance for a peace witnessing "community of brethren" (Barmen III) across the Iron Curtain speaks volumes in this respect, even though it was less noticed in public than Dinkler's minority vote in the Barmen II study several years before.

It is, however, striking that the alleged misfortune of these first two Barmen studies was followed by a period of synodal work both in the West and East of the ECU which brought about exactly what the Theological Board had been unable to set forth (and what their former chairman had desired so badly): a Christian witness to peace expressing a community of brethren across the Iron Curtain. In his study on the relationship between the ECU and the GDR, Friedrich Winter has pointed out the decisive events between 1980 and 1983, the years of the debate on the NATO Double Track Decision (1979).²⁶

The unexpected unity of opinions between the Western and the Eastern regions of the ECU first appeared in May 1980 at the same Eastern Regional Synod who disappointed the Joint Councils' expectations by taking a very distanced resolution concerning the study in Barmen III.²⁷ In a Resolution to Eberhard Natho's Account of Presidency, the Synod pleaded the *idea of brotherly community within the church and linked it*

²⁶ In what follows I am relying on Winter, ECU and GDR, 266–313.

²⁷ The resolution has been published together with the Vote on Barmen III itself (17), but not so the (eventually declined) Joint Councils' resolution in favour of the Vote, cf. 59th Consultation of the Joint Councils on May 7, 1980: Archive of the PEC, C 10310, vol. II, 1/80.

*closely to the Christian hope for worldwide peace.*²⁸ Only four weeks later, the Western Regional Synod adopted formulations from the Eastern Synod in their own Resolution for Peace.²⁹ A similar event took place two years later (1982) when (again) Natho called for brotherly unanimity in the efforts for peace on either side of the Iron Curtain.³⁰ This time the

²⁸ In his Presidential Account, Natho referred to the idea of “a church of brethren” (Materials for the 3rd Consultation of the 5th Synod of the ECU [GDR Region], May 16–18, 1980, 10) to characterize the problem of church internal communication as one aspect of the first section of the account, dealing with mission and evangelisation (2–11). The second section was dedicated to the peace issue (11–23). The link between both was created in the Synod’s Resolution which introduces the geopolitical peace issue as follows: “In his account, the President of the Council has expressed the feeling of grief about having too little time for brotherly conversation with his co-workers. We share this feeling in respect to the conversation among the co-workers in all areas [of the church]. It is of particular necessity in the church of today so that brothers and sisters have got time for each other for conversation in consolation and admonition. [...] ‘Truly’ herein ‘starts the peace’ that is above all reason. Also in conversation with representatives of state and society we may have confidence in the ‘clarifying, urging, asking, thinking, helping word’ to bring forth what it promises in the name of the Prince of Peace.” (33; quotes within quotes are from Natho’s account)

²⁹ Cf. Winter, ECU and GDR, 285.

³⁰ Natho’s interest in a peace witness across the Iron Curtain is obvious from the fact that he repeatedly denied the possibility of an autonomous peace movement in the GDR (cf. Materials for the 1st Consultation of the 6th Synod of the ECU [GDR Region] on June 4–6, 1982, 20f. and [FRG] Federal Archive, D 0–4, 622, 2. First daily piece of information [reported by Winter, ECU and GDR, 290]). Natho referred to the “Swords into Ploughshares” movement among the East German youth (cf. Anke Silomon, “Swords into Ploughshares” and the GDR. The Peace Work of the Evangelical Churches in the GDR in the Time of the Peace Decades 1980–1982, Göttingen 1999 [Studies in Contemporary Church History, ser. B, vol. 32]); the peace activities of several congregations in Berlin, esp. Pankow (cf. Marianne Subklew-Jeutner, The Pankow Peace Circle. The History of an East Berlin Group within the Evangelical Churches in the GDR 1981–1989, Osnabrück 2004), also deserve notice.

Western adoption of the Eastern resolution for peace³¹ is even more remarkable because it frankly affronted a resolution which the West German Reformed Federation had taken to declare the confessional state (*status confessionis*) after the NATO decision to station cruise missiles in West Germany.³²

Following Winter's assessment of these hot years of the Cold War, we can say that within no more than two years brotherhood in peace witness across the Iron Curtain had grown closer than the denominational bonds the regional ECU bodies entertained within the church family of the Reformation, the Western region being linked to the Reformed traditions of Barmen and the Eastern region following the ecumenical peace engagement of the WCC. As Winter argues, the newly discovered brotherhood in peace witness reached its peak in the summer of 1983 when the unity of German Protestantism ascended to the national level in a letter which the ECG and the FEC wrote jointly to Helmut Kohl and Erich Honecker, reminding them of the peace responsibility of both German states.³³ The Joint Councils of the ECU supported this letter.³⁴

Looking back on this hot stage of the Cold War, it can of course be argued that the reasons for the growing brotherly unity between the two regions of the ECU lay mainly in the political pressure caused by the armament activities in the Soviet Union and the United States – and not so much in an increasing “community of brethren” within the church. However, we would oversimplify things by focusing only on the political outcome of the church's witness and neglecting its theological foundations. We should not forget that it was the ECU who, in their 1970s interpretation of the Barmen Declaration, claimed

³¹ So Heinrich Reiß as the President of the Council of the ECU-West. cf. Proceedings of the 1st Consultation of the 6th Synod of the ECU (Western Region) on June 18-20, 1982, 102 (reported in Winter, ECU and GDR, 292).

³² Cf. The Confession for Jesus Christ and the Peace Responsibility of the Church. A Declaration of the Reformed Federation, Gütersloh 1982.

³³ The letter from Aug. 10, 1983 has been published in: Church Yearbook 110 (1983) 57.

³⁴ Cf. Archive of the PEC, C 10302, vol. XVI, 7/83, minutes p. 2 and attachment 1 (transfer A 221/83).

Christological foundation for political ethics. The internal dispute about the shape of this ethics does not compromise the general theological claim. On the other hand, of course, the eventual peace witness which the Theological Board and Synods articulated in the early 1980s is not a direct result of their theological investigations in the preceding decade the fairly theoretical investigation and practical witness of the brotherly community appear disparate at first sight.

However, it would be overhasty to rule out the possibility that the ECU *discovered their brotherly community precisely over its breaking apart*. If the ecclesial "community of brethren" is really such a costly good as Barmen III insinuates, then it would only be logical that it is most valuable when it is at stake. The notion of brotherly community, in the sense of living as one, would then include a rather pragmatic understanding in the sense of *two brothers who commonly confess to quarrel with each other*. The theological category of *witness* seems adequate to express this *pragmatic aspect of confession*. Certainly the peace witness which the ECU Councils and Synods articulated in the early 1980s included this pragmatic aspect, since the peace resolutions from these years were commonly articulated by two sibling churches whose community included quarrel even about the meaning of brotherhood³⁵ Can the pragmatic aspect of witness therefore be helpful to disclose the relationship between peace in the full sense of the word as expressed in Eph 2:14 and its rather pragmatic rendering in Ps 133:1? In order to answer this question, the final section of my presentation will return to the general theological claim we have encountered in the history of the ECU during this hot stage of the Cold War.

IV The Twofold Address of the Christian Witness to Peace

The claim to ground political ethics on Christology is at the heart of the interpretation of the Barmen Declaration which the Theological Board of the ECU has inaugurated by its study

³⁵ On this quarrel cf. thesis 2 above.

in Barmen II. Given this claim, it seems convincing in terms of methodology to postulate, as Walter Kreck did, unanimous ethical consequences from one and the same gospel, and the quest for a brotherly community in the church (Barmen III) is consistent. However, Martin Honecker, Kreck's younger colleague at Bonn, published a refutation of this claim³⁶ which used only methodological arguments.

Due to its theological exclusiveness, M. Honecker argues, Christology naturally neglects the peculiarities of the ethical situation and therefore fails to serve as a criterion in the given situation. In other words, the alleged "criteria" from Christology or theology in general lead to ambiguous "decisions" and, according to M. Honecker, need to be preceded by an analysis of the ethical situation using merely sociological, not theological criteria. Thus M. Honecker's basic methodological concern makes the distinction between the ethical situation and its theological evaluation.³⁷ It is obvious that M. Honecker's hint to the sociological diversity of the ethical situation is incompatible both with a Christological foundation and a brotherly unanimity of ethical decisions. In short, Christology – and theology in general – cannot start an ethical argument, according to M. Honecker.³⁸

Though it is convincing in terms of *methodology*, Honecker's refutation of Kreck's interpretation of Barmen does not necessarily affect the peace witness we encountered in and around the Barmen studies of the ECU, since this witness is a

³⁶ Cf. Martin Honecker, *Theological Criteria and Political Judgment. Questioning the Vote of the Theological Board of the ECU "On the Political Mandate of the Christian Congregation" (Barmen 2)*, in: *Journal for Theology and Church*, vol. 71 (1974), 456–490.

³⁷ Cf. M. Honecker, *Criteria*, 485 on the "difference between empirical analysis and theological judgment".

³⁸ Like Dinkler in his defence of his minority vote on Barmen II (cf. fn. 15 above), M. Honecker, *Criteria*, 464 rightly points out that the practical recommendations which the ECU (West) vote gives (for the issues of *a*) democracy, *b*) economic systems, and *c*) exercise of power) do *not* use the Christological criterion! This criticism is even more important since it also applies to the recommendations for East Germany, which do not draw on Christology, but on the doctrine of creation (cf. e.g. *Vote on Barmen II* [Separate Print 1975], 33–35: "Society under the Creator's Word").

pragmatic process which bridges the gulf M. Honecker opens between theology and the ethical situation.³⁹ As the synodal resolutions from the ECU have shown, such *witness* is neither a description of the geopolitical situation nor its theological evaluation, but it *expresses an anxiety and hope for this situation which results from the church's own involvement in the situation*. This pragmatic structure implies that within witness the alleged Christological criteria – like his promise for peace (Eph 2:14) – are mirrored critically in the light of the church's situation. E.g., in the case of the ECU peace resolution taken by the Eastern Regional Synod in 1980, it was a self-adhortation for brotherly community in the Christian congregations that enabled Eberhard Natho in his Account of Presidency to address the worldwide peace issue.⁴⁰ In this respect Natho mentioned explicitly the growing estrangement between the local congregations and the church leading boards after they had taken up official negotiation with the socialistic state especially at the face-to-face meeting with E. Honecker in 1978. And there had been other issues like the self-cremation of the parishioner of Zeitz, Oskar Brüsewitz, in 1976.⁴¹ This event was disapproved by various church officials,⁴² while many Christians in the GDR recognized it as a sign of protest demanding individual human rights only one year after the Final Act of Helsinki.

³⁹ Had M. Honecker known the East German ecclesial debate about the Vote on Barmen II (cf. fn. 17 above) and the recommendations for East Germany (which were only published one year after his essay), he might have alleviated his criticism. These documents show clearly that in East German church and theology Barmen was less considered a doctrinal document than a practical aid to the situation of congregations. The theological point of this attitude (which may have been overlooked by many in the West) is that it values Barmen as a *practical* instrument for the *analysis* of the ecclesial situation.

⁴⁰ Cf. fn. 28 above.

⁴¹ Cf. Harald Schultze, *The Signal of Zeitz. Reactions to the Self-Cremation of Oskar Brüsewitz 1976. A Documentation*, Leipzig 1993. – Helmut Müller-Enbergs/Heike Schmoll/Wolfgang Stock, *The Fire Signal. The Immolation of Parishioner Brüsewitz and the Evangelical Church*, Frankfurt 1993.

⁴² Cf. e.g. Winter, ECU and GDR, 276 fn. 203.

There is *no semantical or logical connection* between the signal of Zeitz, as Brüsewitz' act of self-cremation was soon called, and the Act of Helsinki, but the simple *pragmatics of communication* pointed at least to an indirect connection, because the communication for the church both with its own members and with the political representatives became more difficult. The church could not afford to disregard an event which had upset so many people in the church. In terms of pragmatics, Brüsewitz' peaceless sign did represent the peace issue, though in a negative way by expressing the absence of peace. Natho's Presidential Account in 1980 and its connection between church internal communication and the peace issue appears like a lesson learned from these events because in his speech the gateway to brotherly community in the sense of geopolitical peace is to admit the church internal lack of such a "community of brethren".

In contrast to M. Honecker's view, Natho's speech is an example of how theology can start an ethical argument, namely by *opening a horizon for critical self-perception*. Then the argument does not start with a logical premise, but with an open question, which has a logical and a theological function. The logical one is to bring the "asking self" into community with others who ask the same question from outside of theology, while the theological function is to bring this question "before God", which is the core element of any Christian witness. By transferring a question into the horizon "before God" witness confesses that this question is not theological by itself but can be dealt with in a religious manner, since it belongs to people of every religion regardless of their personal religious convictions. In other words, by treating certain issues in a religious manner, Christian witness opens them for interreligious treatment. The confessional element of a transfer "before God", which is constitutive of any religious witness, requires the religious horizon in order to exclude unjust religious claims concerning that which is being witnessed.⁴³

⁴³ As Paul Ricœur has argued in his major study *The Symbolism of Evil* (translated by Emerson Buchanan), Boston 1969, the category "before God" turns guilt into sin and thus allows for a divine pardon that frees people from overhasty moral or juridical judgment.

Peace is undoubtedly among the most prominent of these issues. Peace as such is not a religious issue, let alone a Christian issue. But of course when Christians engage for peace, they do *as Christians*, and their Christian contribution⁴⁴ to the many-sided efforts for peace will be to place peace in the centre “before God” where it does not belong to any particular side. The significance of this modest contribution is obvious in the history of the ECU during the Cold War when the concept of peace turned into a rhetorical “weapon” in the hands of the GDR administration, as Michael Beintker has shown.⁴⁵ Armin Boyens even speaks of a “peace divided” between the West and the East and reproaches the Western peace movement for *not* placing peace in the sense of disarmament in the wider horizon of its ideological, or we might add, religious, aspects.⁴⁶ At first sight paradoxically, Natho’s Presidential Account at the Eastern

⁴⁴ In the case of the East German Protestantism, this contribution is known as the “third way” beyond the alternative of the political systems in the Cold War. The theological significance of such a third way is that it does not necessarily refrain from *political* judgment, but can include a *theological* judgment on politics.

⁴⁵ As Michael Beintker, *The Idea of Peace as a Weapon in the Cold War*, in: *Contemporary Church History*, vol. 4 (1991), 249–259 has argued, the political doctrine of the SUP claimed peace exclusively as a state affair, putting the churches off with the Christian Peace Conference (established in Prague in 1958), which in the course of time turned into a tool of socialist peace propaganda (cf. 254).

⁴⁶ Cf. Armin Boyens, *Peace Divided. Remarks on the Peace Movement in the 80s*, in: *Contemporary Church History*, vol. 8 (1995), 440–509. Although Boyens’ admonition not to reduce peace to disarmament, but to include the issues of democracy and human rights (489) is certainly worth reflecting, however, his overall thesis that only the Christian peace movement in the GDR held this broader, politically “independent” (483f.) peace concept, whereas its FRG counterpart was under the “heteronomous” (462) influence of the *East* German (co-)financed Communist Party in West Germany (461 and *passim*) is speculative and builds too much on Boyens’ (and his teacher Besier’s) findings how the SUP (and Alexander Schalck-Golodkowski in particular) managed to divert the ECG’s financial support for the East German Evangelical churches from its intended use (cf. e.g. Boyens, *Talk in a Showcase*, 217 fn. 24).

Regional Synod in 1980 is an example of how such hot issues like individual human rights could from a religious viewpoint be better discussed in the Cold War situation than in the immediate political discourse. The various instances when the synod had to cope with Hanfried Müller's petitions in favour of the GDR state and its religion policy⁴⁷ show how careful the ECU were not to let their peace resolutions take sides with either of the political systems. The Christian contribution to peace was in these instances simply to stand in the middle even if that prolonged the status quo of the divided brotherhood with the ecclesial peace witness in West Germany, who often felt obliged to take sides with someone.

These examples lead us back to the question we started with: How does the biblical promise that Christ is our peace (Eph 2:14) relate to the idea of brotherly community (Ps 133:1)? In concrete: *Could the status quo of simple coexistence be a step on the path to peace or astray?* The history of the peace witness in the ECU during the Cold War has acquainted us with very different situations on either side of the Iron Curtain. This warns us better not to jump too fast to a conclusion, since an analysis of these situations must come first, as Martin Honecker insists. However, in contrast to his conclusions our reflections seem to suggest that *religious convictions can start the path to peace if they place the issue in the middle between either side "before God"*. This "third way" of a peace witness enables the church to recognize its anxiety and hope – its own peacelessness and need for God's peace. Such a peace witness requires particularly two things of the Christians that coincide with the theological and logical functions of their witness. They are best summed up in the concluding theses of my presentation:

Thesis #4: It is essential for the peace witness of a Christian church to *confess* their own need of Christ's peacemaking love *especially in their community with sibling churches* (cf. Ps 133:1).

⁴⁷ On Müller's peace activities in the Regional ECU Synod (East) cf. Winter, ECU and GDR, 288 (Extraordinary Synod 1981) and 293f. (Extraordinary Synod 1983).

*Thesis #5: It is essential for the peace witness of a Christian church to *argue rationally* for the truth of their hope in Christ's peace (cf. Eph 2:14) especially in conversation with partners who do not hold any religious conviction.*

Given these requirements, the Christian witness to Christ as our peace will simultaneously create a “community of brethren” *between the church and the world* that embraces both the church external and internal meanings this term has adopted in the ecclesial discourse during the Cold War.

Appendix: **Tables of Information on Section II**

<i>Year</i>	<i>Document (Authors)</i>	<i>Published (German texts online, Sept. 28th, 2011)</i>
1945	Stuttgart Confession of Guilt (Council of the ECG)	Church Yearbook 72–75 (1945–48) 26f. http://www.ekd.de/bekenntnisse/stuttgarter_schulderklaerung.html
1947	Darmstadt Word on the Political Way of Our People (Council of Brethren of the ECG)	Church Yearbook 72–75 (1945–48) 220–222 http://cms.reformiert-ronsdorf.de/attachments/111_Darmstädter_Wort.pdf
1965	On the Situation of the Displaced and on the Relation of the German People to its Neighbours in the East (Council of the ECG)	Memoranda of the ECG, vol. I/1, 77-126 http://www.ekd.de/EKD-Texte/45952.html

Table 1

<i>Year</i>	<i>Church fellowship</i>	<i>Members</i>	<i>Institutions (selected)</i>
1945/48	Evangelical Church in Germany ECG	27 (2011: 22) Lutheran, Reformed and United member churches	Council (1945) Council of Brethren (until 1948) Synod (1948)
1948	United Evangelical- Lutheran Church of Germany UELCG	9 (1967: 11) Lutheran member churches	Conference of Bishops, Leading Bishop General Synod Church Leading Board
1953 (until 2003)	Evangelical Church of the Union ECU	6 (1960: 7) United member churches	Synod Council Church Office and Theological Board
1968 (until 1989)	United Evangelical- Lutheran Church in the GDR (UELC-GDR)	3 Lutheran member churches	analogous to UECLG, but in close cooperation with FEC
1969 (until 1990)	Federation of Evangelical Churches in the GDR (FEC)	8 Lutheran and United member churches	Synod Conference of Church Leading Boards (consultations with ECG Council)
1972 (until 1990)	Western and Eastern Region of the ECU	West: 2 member churches + Berlin (West) East: 5 member churches	Regional Synods East (Synod Members also Members of FEC Synod) and West Council Sections East and West Joint Councils

Table 2