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Lutheran Pastor from the GDR Speaks on Peace and Justice in the East-West Perspective

The Seventh Assembly of the Lutheran World Federation was held in Budapest from 22 July to 5 August this year. Assemblies take place every six or seven years; but this year for the first time the Assembly was preceded by a Youth Gathering which brought together over 300 young Lutherans from all parts of the world. We are publishing here a summary, including lengthy verbatim passages, of an address given to the Youth Gathering by Pastor Harald Brettschneider of Dresden on the theme "Peace and Justice in the East-West Perspective". The address is notable for its even-handedness and for the insights it gives into the efforts being made by young Christians in the GDR in the cause of peace, the problems which preoccupy them and some of the difficulties they face in the course of their work.

Passages without quotation marks are summaries of Pastor Brettschneider's text; those in quotation marks are direct translations from the address.

An old house in Boizenburg (60 miles north of Berlin) bears the inscription "God bless this house, and all those who come in and go out." Below that there is a notice "Local Police". A GDR journal has printed a picture of the house, with the comment: "Passing the buck again." Brettschneider, feeling that he must not shift off his own responsibility, analyses his chosen theme under three headings: "the Alarm Clock", "Danger: High Tension!" and "First Aid".

1. *The Alarm Clock*

The alarm clock is there to rouse us from a spirit of weariness and apathy. Most people

have been deeply affected by the stationing of new rocket systems in the East and West, and just will not listen to the disastrously overworked word "peace" any more. Some have lost their faith in God and man.

The alarm clock tells us about the hour that is striking. We must not think only of our own inner peace. The confession of Christ and the recognition of the world on the one hand, prayer and the doing of righteousness on the other — these are the two foundations on which the Christian witness for peace rests.

The alarm clock encourages us. Only too well do we know the limitations of our strength. We know that true peace can only be established by God Himself. Yet we are not entitled to sit by with our hands folded and just wait for peace to come.

"We have responsibility for a single undivided world [. . .] Justice for the third world and the necessity of safeguarding peace in the conflict between East and West — these are problems which must be solved together. The armaments race is carried on at the expense of the third world [. . .] To fix our eyes on the nuclear threat, disregarding the world-wide panorama of human distress, is to establish more strongly the structures of unrighteousness. How long will mankind put up with such a situation? More and more people are imprisoned, tortured, robbed of their religious freedom, spied on, violently uprooted, forcefully resettled or driven into exile. All this is a litany of death.

We must wake up and recognise the fatal mistake of trying to win life for ourselves by perfecting the means of killing [. . .] In the Bible peace and righteousness always go hand in hand [. . .] Thus in Isaiah 32 and 33 we find the words, "The effect of righteousness will be peace and the result of righteousness, quietness and trust . . . The Lord will fill Zion with justice and righteousness; and he will be the stability of your times, abundance of salvation, wisdom and knowledge [. . .]"

2. *Danger: High Tension*

To understand the problem of East-West tension, the nature of the East-West clash must be analysed. The great powers, with the States which belong to the NATO and Warsaw Pact alliances, have different economic systems (capitalism and socialism), based on different conceptions of economic life, of democracy and of law, different state structures and different understandings of human rights. On the one hand there is the socialist planned economy; on the other the free market system. Bitterness and conflict arise out of the absolute claims which are made by both systems. Economic spheres of interest, access to raw materials, competition for markets and — last but not least — concerns for domestic stability create the background for all kinds of political and ideological clashes. Worries about security and threats from the other side have led to the arms race.

Military-political concepts like "defence by deterrence", "balance of forces" and so forth have avoided armed conflict in Europe. But competition in armaments has resulted. Weapons and bestial names like "means of mass destruction" have sprung up, and in this way the northern hemisphere has become an explosive powder-keg.

"These means of mass destruction demonstrate humanity's boundless arrogance in the face of God. But He alone is Lord; He alone decides on life and death. Now that the heavens are full of new weaponry the question of Heavenly Power is posed in a quite new way."

It is not human foes, but the means of mass destruction in themselves which constitute the primary danger for the world. We have become the slaves of our own products. We do not possess the means of mass destruction; the means of destruction pos-

sess us. Whether or not to unleash these weapons is decided by a computer.

In the 1970s there was some measure of détente, as was shown by the Helsinki and Madrid conferences, the disarmament negotiations in Vienna, and the efforts made in Geneva to agree limitations or reductions in medium-range nuclear systems. These moves, however, came to nothing and since then technology has advanced. New factors such as the increase of tactical nuclear weapons have disturbed the precarious balance. Such is the background to the decision to station medium-range American missiles in Western Europe and to prepare and install Soviet tactical rockets in Eastern Europe.

"A friend demonstrated to me how complicated the situation is. On 11 November 1983 he talked to leading Soviet and American diplomats in the GDR.

The Deputy Ambassador of the Soviet Union explained his country's attitude under six headings:

(1) The safeguarding of peace is achieved by the balance of forces.

(2) At the moment the Soviet side has a superiority in rocketry on land, but the United States are superior at sea and in the air.

(3) The present situation represents an approximate balance of forces.

(4) The installation of Pershing II missiles in Western Europe will achieve so great an American superiority that Soviet counter-measures will be essential.

(5) Since the War of Independence the Americans have not experienced war on their own soil. The terrible sufferings of the Soviet Union during the Second World War must not be repeated.

(6) The invasion of Grenada reveals American intentions.

The American Ambassador in the GDR explained her country's views along the following lines:

(1) We Americans wish for a balance of forces.

(2) The Soviet Union has a superiority on land.

(3) We are certainly superior at sea and in the air, but the accuracy and reliability of the SS 20 compels a reply from us.

(4) We need Pershing II to compel

the Soviet Union to take some measures on disarmament.

(5) President Reagan wants peace. The anti-Americanism displayed in Europe is a disappointment.

(6) The Church's advice to make a 'venture in trust' is not helpful. Politicians must face facts. The shooting down of the Korean airliner by the Soviet Union shows the realities of the situation."

We in Germany are specially hard hit by the nuclear arms race — not only because of our joint war-guilt, but also by the multiplication of destructive weapons on our own territory. For this reason "Aktion Sühnezeichen" (a group calling for forgiveness and reconciliation — *Ed.*) has addressed a letter to both the American and Soviet representatives in the GDR, calling attention to the fact that German soil is stained by the blood of Soviet and American soldiers; the soil is occupied by the dead of those who fell in battle against a common foe, and there is no room for rocketry. I am glad that efforts are being made to limit the harm done by the advent of new weapons, and to continue an attitude of détente. I am glad I can say this of politicians in my own country.

The subject of freedom and justice in the light of the conflict between East and West should not *only* be considered in the light of danger to life caused by the accumulation of armaments, research, nuclear tests and so forth. The cost of armaments hinders the solution of problems in health care, education and ecology. Science and technology are steadily becoming mere tools in the service of the will to possess and exploit the world for selfish ends. Obvious examples are the poisoning of the atmosphere, the destruction of forests, the contamination of water. Man as a being made in the image of God is being degraded into an object for man's domination.

"I recently met a young man whose T-shirt bore the slogan 'That's that, folks!' This harbinger of the Apocalypse was employed in the development of micro-processing equipment. What astounding things this equipment has achieved! And yet it has contributed in a large measure to unemployment. In this connection the question of law, of justice and of peace raises its head in an entirely new way.

The witness of the Old Testament prophets on the theme of power needs

now to be considered. The following points emerge.

(1) Power is a gift of God which humanity must treat with responsibility.

(2) Responsible dealings with power are not to be expected only from politicians and scientists, but from every single individual.

(3) Misuse of power leads both to accountability before God and to the destruction of the community of mankind.

Micah and Amos speak about power in the following terms:

— The greed and brutality of the rich, who bleed the poor white (Micah 2:1)

— They strip the robe from the peaceful man and take the harmless traveller captive, as if it were war (Micah 2:8)

— Corruptibility of judges; their failure to observe the law (Micah 3:1)

— Deception and falsehood in business affairs (Micah 6:10-12, 7:2)

— Dishonesty in everyday life; moral decay; the corruptibility of spiritual leaders as far as the practice of religion is concerned; traffic in human beings; contempt for the weak.

We have all experienced the validity of this witness. I am one of those who were dragged out of the ruins of a bombed house in Dresden on 13 February 1945. In my schooldays I was taught never again to put my hand to a weapon of war. When I came to apply for professional training, the response was: if you want the privileges that go with a course of study as an architect, you must volunteer for army service. A few weeks ago I went to a parents' evening at my son's school, at which the subject of pre-military instruction (*Wehrunterricht*) came under discussion. Afterwards parents said to me, 'it was a good thing that you spoke up. Of course we could not say anything, because we have to think of our children's future.' We must indeed. But it is wrong if we pay more attention to these concerns than to obedience to God's Word. We become easy to manipulate, and we lack civil courage.

Naturally young people are concerned about peace and justice. Many a time have I had discussions with young people, at which the following ideas have been expressed:

'We are the soldiers, who would give their lives if the worst happened. Our need for professional training as civilians means that we are particularly at risk. We are very worried about the dangerous preparations for war throughout the world, which in no way increase our chances of survival.'

'We just do not understand the fine phrases of "peaceful" policies which are not accompanied by the slightest sign of disarmament. The ending of all military education and publicity in school, at work and in public life generally would be such a sign — our country's capacity for defence would not be affected in any way.'

'Discussion of the justification of and need for military service, we are well aware, has reached a critical stage. We realise how much our country stresses disarmament in its contacts with the outside world. The urgency of this propaganda springs from the "murderous character" of atomic weapons. When it is a matter of recruitment for military careers or military training, however, this dangerous quality is made to seem harmless, or it is irrelevantly made into a test for the award of university places.'

'We are aware of the discrepancy between the news given by the mass media about the peace movement in other countries and the quiet discrimination against peace activism at home, on the grounds that it is a danger to peace or even a danger to the State.'

'We are subjected to years of military education (*Wehrerziehung*), and we conclude that the politicians can have very little confidence in the practicability of their own proposals for disarmament, if so many years of military education are deemed necessary.'

It is no wonder that so many young people concern themselves with non-violence, military service and conscientious objection [. . .] They are ready to be critical of the society in which they live, but in my opinion most of their criticisms are not directed against society itself, but against ideas about defence which in the face of a nuclear holocaust amount to nothing less than the suicide of humanity. They are pre-

pared to be aware of problems, and do not merely retreat into a private existence [. . .] It is therefore wise to take note of their activities and their cries for help."

3. *First Aid*

I cannot think of peace and justice without reference to the justification of mankind through God's atoning work; indeed, this doctrine is the very basis of my thinking. (Romans 5: 1-5). God sets forgiveness before law. Christ enables us to have peace with God and the world. Those who base their lives on this justification gain clear insight into the realities of the present world and receive strength to act. The man whose bones are broken is restored through the cross of Jesus and given life with Christ. "I live, and you shall also live."

From this situation there springs a great desire for a life in peace and justice. This desire is founded on faith. It disturbs the slumbers of the apathetic. At the same time this desire recognises our own guilt. It recognises our "life with the Bomb" as a faked coalition with death, and results in penitence and conversion; it is also ready to suffer.

From this desire there follow certain outward and visible signs. The seemingly hopeless struggle against wrong is infectious.

"It leads to a world-wide association of those who live peacefully and without violence, joyfully and yet not fanatically, lovingly and without hate. I think of the "Freeze" movement in the USA, the Norwegian women's peace march, the protests of the Sicilian farmers against the Comiso military base. I think of the hundreds of thousands who demonstrated for peace in Bonn. I think of the young people who were in the *Kreuzkirche* (Church of the Cross) in Dresden, and those who wore the 'Swords into Ploughshares' badge in the full knowledge of what the slogan meant [. . .] As justified sons of God we can knowingly accept responsibility. The insights of our faith must be turned into actions which are realistic in political terms. Such a sharing of responsibility often leads to entanglement in the mechanisms of power, and such entanglement may have a sinful quality. Nevertheless, we must take the risk. As examples of Christian insights being turned into political realities one

might quote the Churches' contribution to the themes of 'mutual security', 'confidence-building measures' and 'interdependence'.

Many young people have been campaigning for some kind of 'peace-service' in the purely social sphere. As a practical sign of their aim they serve, quite voluntarily, a nineteenth month in hospitals or homes for the elderly after completing the statutory period of military service. Young people have tried to introduce their own special witness for peace into the state's official peace activities. Many have accepted political responsibilities in the framework of the Prague 'Christian Peace Conference'. Others take different initiatives within the limits of what the law permits: for example, personal peace treaties with individual citizens of the other countries attempting 'disarmament from below'. They undertake not to shoot at each other. The intention is that understanding and trust should increase between the individuals concerned, and thus between the States to which they belong. It is difficult to work out an independent witness for peace or to put it into practice in such a way that it cannot be deemed or shown to be hostile to the State [. . .]

Most significant of all is the attitude of Christians and of the Church to the means of mass destruction and to problems arising from military service [. . .]

About the problem of whether or not Christians can regard armed service as 'in the cause of peace' there is no common mind. A publication of 1965 in the GDR recommended non-combatant service in the "construction units" (*Baueinheiten*) as a clearer expression of God's will to bring peace to the world. Some reject military service altogether, and are imprisoned for this or suffer other consequences. They live according to a morality which must be the prevailing morality in the future if we are to survive. The decision is a matter of conscience, to be faced by the individual Christian."

The use of atomic weapons cannot be justified by Christians; on this point there is no doubt. This is confirmed by a weighty pronouncement of the Federal Synod of the GDR in September 1983, which denies the

whole spirit and logic of the deterrent idea. However, there is room for policies which attempt step by step to get away from the deterrence principle and set up a new order based on justice. One should also stress the request made by the Sixth Assembly of the World Council of Churches to the constituent Churches "urgently to request their Governments to recognise the right of conscientious objection, and to call for the establishment of a period of unarmed social service as an alternative to conscription".

"The longing for peace stimulates people's creative faculties. There is a period of ten days every November when youth and parish groups throughout the country give their attention to some specific aspect of the Churches' responsibility for peace. This year the theme is 'life against death'. Posters, book-marks and leaflets, all carrying short prayers for daily use, make an impact on the non-churchgoer. I was most moved by the fact that the phrase, 'Swords into Ploughshares' (the slogan of a recent 'Ten days for Peace') brought the peace witness of the Bible into such prominence that people began to discuss it in the street.

The longing for peace caused many Dresden Christians to maintain a chain of prayer, day and night, from the middle of September to the middle of November 1983 [. . .] As a result, a letter was sent to the Chairman of the Council of State of the GDR: ' . . . We know that the ideas of Jesus, particularly in respect of the love of one's neighbour and of one's enemy, have been thought to be impracticable and even irrational. However, in the light of the deadly armaments spiral a liberating impulse can be found in them . . . so that the headlong automatic rush towards death can be stopped.'

Fasting for peace has the same motivation. Young people take their sleeping bags and airbeds into a church and fast for twenty-four hours or even for a week. They try to establish a symbol of a new life-style of peace and justice.

Other people hold candles and flowers. For them these things are symbols of light and life in the face of darkness and death. They rely on the saying

'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is in the weak.'

In many peace workshops and seminaries a most active educational work is carried out on problems of peace and justice. In the Königswalde peace seminar, for example, the theme worked on was "The Sermon on the Mount and political responsibility for peace."

I have tried to expound my theme under the three headings given.

Finally I would beg the World Assembly to demand, throughout the world:

— The separation of pre-military training from school and the educational process.

— The ending of any kind of discrimination against those who witness independently for peace, and against conscientious objectors.

— An end to nuclear research and nuclear tests.

Finally, I beg people to take just as much notice of cries for help from the young as they do of their own concern about their own existence.