The Ghosts of Westphalia: Fictions and Ideals of Ecclesial Unity in Enlightenment Germany

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Much of Ralph Del Colle’s work has been devoted to the study of the beliefs and practices that Christian churches share, and it is therefore fitting to reflect on some ecumenical projects of the past and the historical context in which they developed. For the purpose of this paper, the period after the Thirty Years War and the Peace of Westphalia (referred to as Westphalia) is of particular interest because the Holy Roman Empire was a hotbed of ecumenical disputes. I will look first at a few legal instruments of Westphalia for obtaining religious peace and emphasize the fact that this “constitution” of the empire entailed the explicit command for a reunification of the churches. These instruments, such as parity and nonsectarian jurisprudence, prepared the way for an irenic approach to theological differences with an eye toward a reunion of faiths. At the same time, however, they also impeded any potential reunion because of their political consequences. In the eighteenth century, under the influence of the academy movement, the time seemed to have come for a new way of approaching a reunion. While the Neuwied Academy conceived such an attempt in a universalist manner that disregarded theological truth claims, the Fulda Academy focused on improving mutual theological understanding as the way to overcome differences.

1. First presented at the Notre Dame Institute of Advanced Study, Fall 2010.
The Peace of Westphalia of 1648, consisting of the peace treaties of Osnabrück and Munster, not only ended the Thirty Years War but also brought about an armistice between Protestants and Catholics concerning the nature of the true Catholic Church. In order to reinstate order and unity in the realm, the opposing religious parties agreed to regard their confessional differences as unsettled doctrinal conflicts that would no longer fragment the political balance of the empire. What the Empire had achieved in the treaties was therefore not a tri-confessional nation but a legal, constitutional foundation for a reunion of the churches. Any other conclusion would have meant sacrificing the religious truth claim of one of the parties. It was only because the Peace of Westphalia was an instrument for a reunion of the Churches that the severe restrictions on the power of the pope and bishops and the suspension of canon law (e.g., about waging holy war against heretics) were acceptable to Catholic princes. This theological view of the treaty only disappeared in the eighteenth century, when Protestant scholars of jurisprudence began to see the emergency laws, which gave Protestant sovereigns rights over the churches, as settled and perpetually established positive law. Catholics, however, continued to interpret the religious peace as an exterior armistice, which only suspended canon law until all Protestants were once more in full communion with the Roman Catholic Church. Only at the end of the eighteenth century did Catholic jurists seem to have given up this notion, especially under the influence of Christian Wolff (1679-1754) and the church reforms of
Emperor Joseph II (1780–1790). The reason for the existence of the state was now seen solely in the welfare of the people without any reference to religion. This new principle also served as legitimization for Catholic princes to absorb more powers over ecclesial property. The more sovereigns controlled church possessions and policy (jus circa sacra), however, the less likely it became that they would reduce such precious influence for the sake of Christian unity. Thus, a crucial part of Westphalia, the demand for a reunion of faiths, had become a fiction nobody paid much attention any more.

Another result of the peace treaties that initially appeared to settle religious dispute was that of religious parity. The best example for the parity of religious groups was the Imperial Diet, the Reichstag, where majority votes on religious topics were suspended. Instead, the two confessional bodies of the Imperial Diet, Protestants (Lutherans and Calvinists in the Corpus Evangelicorum) and Catholics (Corpus Catholico rum) were expected to vote on religious issues separately (itio in partes) so that one body could not impose their majority vote upon the other. These bod-

ies, however, were not officially and constitutionally recognized as the corporate voices of Protestantism and Catholicism, but were somewhat semi-official. While centuries later the *itio in partes* has been recognized as a means of keeping religious peace, contemporaries disliked it because it easily became an impediment to the regular activities of the *Imperial Diet* and was therefore only invoked in extreme cases (only ten times between 1672 and 1806).\(^9\)

The Peace of Westphalia also guaranteed for the first time that Reformed Churches would have equal rights in the Empire's ecclesial landscape. Consequently, institutions that were sworn to religious parity had to provide the Reformed Church with an equal number of offices, just like the Lutherans and Catholics. An interesting application of this newly conceived parity was the Imperial Cameral Court (*Reichskammergericht*), the highest court of the Empire (together with the *Imperial Aulic Council* in Vienna), where Reformed judges had sat on the bench since 1654.\(^10\) A simple majority vote of the judges was sufficient to decide a case, and every judge was perfectly free in his decision and at least officially protected from external influences.\(^11\) The statutes of the court also made clear that every judge or court member had to declare his religion unmistakably so that *absolute* parity could be exercised. Thus, the case of a Catholic judge, who was married to a Reformed wife and who raised his daughters in the Reformed Church, looked suspicious as to his Catholicity as late as 1760,

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especially because a convert would lose his seat on the bench.\footnote{12} Despite much research on the Reichskammergericht, its religious dimension and its impact on religious history has been utterly neglected; nothing has been written about its role in religious matters in the eighteenth century, although it was arguably the best working tri-confessional institution of the realm and protected most efficiently the religious rights of the Emperor's subjects, while simultaneously keeping the idea of a united realm alive. The statutes of the court, which propagated a "non-sectarian jurisprudence,"\footnote{13} reminded the judges to be tolerant of each other's religious convictions:

Judges of the [three]...religions as well as all persons of the Cameral Court must not despise others for their religion, nor scorn at each other, or give in to ill will, but must be always friendly to each other and of good will, and have to demonstrate in every way that they work peacefully and tranquilly together and will so in the future.\footnote{14}

Following this rule, the court did not reject religious truth claims, but only suspended its judgment on religious matters and solved cases pragmatically. Mutual disagreement and corruption brought the court to a lame-duck-position in the midst of the eighteenth century. Until its end in 1806, the court never fully recovered, and all plans for a reform were


\footnote{13. Benjamin Kaplan, \textit{Divided by Faith, Religious Conflict and the Practice of Toleration in Early Modern Europe} (Cambridge, MA: Belknap, 2007) 232.}

either blocked or never implemented.15 The idea, however, that a court of non-sectarian jurisprudence, using law and reason alone, would resolve religious (and political) problems, remained a crucial ideal for the formation of the reunion academies.

A UNION OF ALL RELIGIONS:
THE NEUWIED ACADEMY

The Free Society for the Renewal [Aufnahme] of Religion was founded in 175416 by the Reformed theologian Johann Heinrich Oest (1727–1777) in the Frisian Islands. For Oest, religion had become marginalized in society and divided people into two categories: those who were overzealous in religious matters and those who were disinterested in religion. Both groups were the target of society, since it explicitly desired to overcome fanaticism and indifferntism. In October 1756 the Count of Neuwied-Runkel was introduced to this project and immediately gave it his special protection. He even lifted any restrictions of censorship from the society. Oest was appointed head of the academy and received the title “professor of polemics.” From then on, the society was called the Academy of Neuwied for a Reunion of Faiths and for the Continuous Improvement of Religion and was the first institutionalized attempt at ecumenism on German soil.17 On 1 January 1757 the establishment of the academy was publicly announced in a 72-page brochure.18 The academy’s organization echoes the judicial context


16. Schriften der Ostfriesischen freyen Gesellschaft zur Aufnahme der Religion (n.p.: 1756). The only surviving copy is in the ducal archive in Neuwied. This archive also holds a number of archival files about the Neuwied Academy. The files are not accessible. See Johann Mathias Schroeckh, Unpartheyische Kirchen-Historie: Alten und Neuen Testaments ... Vierteter Theil, in welchem die Geschichte vom Jahr nach Christi Geburt 1751 bis 1760 enthalten sind (Jena, Hartung 1766) 698.

17. One of the few, accessible archival documents about the academy (especially about the quarrels in 1757) can be found in the Haus-, Hof-, und Staatsarchiv Vienna: Kleinere Reichsstände 537-1-1, including a membership diploma.

of Westphalia, namely a sense for parity, neutrality, and high regard for nonsectarian, mere "reasonable" judgment. Because of its name, one can also detect a strong influence of the European academy movement, which aimed at organizing scholarship and free discussion in academic societies.

The aim of the academy was to bring "enlightened" minds together in order to extract the truths from all "religions" and confute doubts about God's existence and revelation. This society was headed by a clerk (Greffier), who was supposed to collect the theological opinions from other members. These statements were then to be read by all society members in private. No meetings were ever to occur, nor any discussions. Surprisingly, the Neuwied Academy did not discriminate in its membership policy on the basis of gender, religion, or nationality. Also, the number of members was not limited. One could become a scholarly member, and only as such was one expected to participate in the theological discussion, if one had written a "good essay about one or more and especially disputed" theological propositions.\footnote{Nachricht, 612.}

The introduction to the statutes of the academy called religion the "Inbegriff," the core of the most important truths of humanity, which the society was founded to re-discover by resolving the differences between all (!) religions. The underlying belief was that the conflicting truth claims of religions demonstrate that God and his revelation must have been misunderstood by some or even all religions. In order to bring about one faith for all people and in order to silence agnostic as well as atheist doubt, one had to confute the wrong concepts and uncover the real truth about the divine. A necessary presupposition for this, however, was that members could speak their mind; therefore, freedom from censorship was considered essential.\footnote{Nachricht, 585-586.} Although the statutes speak frequently of differences between Christian theological systems, mostly they use "religions" and mention at times Judaism, Islam, and even Paganism, therefore one can understand why most contemporaries read this document as a manifesto of syncretism, as did most contemporaries.

The Neuwied Academy renounced the conversational methods of earlier reunion attempts and understood itself as a community of unprejudiced academics. Unlike earlier reunion attempts that often ended in the heat of oral discussions, exclusively written communication was used in order to avoid ambiguity and emotional distress. This was supposed to

which I rely here.
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be a more serious, undisturbed and intelligible way of communicating. The statutes read: “We write and read . . . . The community among us consists not in congregations or talks, but in written communication . . . of our thoughts” Such written communication was not entirely new since other major literary or academic societies had begun using it a few decades earlier. However, to make it part of an ecumenical or universalist strategy was a major innovation.

To ensure that the members would speak their minds, all members had to be kept unaware of the identities of the others, except for the main clerk and the secretary. Each person was asked to submit statements, which were then condensed and edited without indicating the identity of the author. This policy also ensured that the discussion was about arguments and that the arguments were taken seriously regardless of the reputation of the authors.

Already by July 1757, a number of critics attacked the academy because they believed it was a successor to the Neuwied Ducats Society, a lottery ponzi scheme. The Giessen professor and Lutheran pastor Johann Hermann Brenner (1699–1782) thought a reunion of all faiths and common worship were impossible. The new academy did not convey the necessary message of Christian irenicism but rather of religious pluralism because it also sought to bring non-Christian religions into dialogue with


22. Nachricht, 588.


the churches. Some German sovereigns also protested against the academy because they feared that by circumventing censorship, the academy could publish polemics against basic Christian convictions or against the established parity of confessions in the realm. Especially troublesome was the fact that the academy could consider one or perhaps all of the three officially acknowledged denominations as inferior and attempt to reform them without ecclesiastical or imperial mandate. Moreover, a successful reunion of the Christian denominations would have ended the sovereigns’ say over church affairs. Theologically educated sovereigns feared that the Neuwied project could lead to a fourth religion in the realm, one of syncretism or indifferentism. In light of this, it became necessary for the count of Neuwied to respond to these charges. He claimed that such dangers did not exist and were based on a misinterpretation of the statutes of the academy. He also revoked the freedom from censorship the academy had enjoyed and ordered that the academy proceedings be regarded as a scholarly journal that was bound by Imperial censorship law. Since the academy never attracted a sufficient number of members, and also because famous German theologians like Johann David Michaelis (1717–1791) protested against it, it soon fell into financial trouble. In order to prevent a pending lawsuit of the Protestant count of Hessen-Darmstadt, as well as the Catholic Electors of Cologne and the Palatinate, the count of Neuwied withdrew his protection of the academy and dissolved it in August 1758. Thus, the threat and insult to the established churches was eliminated.

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28. Liersch, Dukaten-Sozietät, 55.


30. The dissolution decree mentions explicitly the threat of the academy to the established churches, at Liersch, Dukaten-Sozietät, 58: "... dennoch zum Theil einiger
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MUTUAL THEOLOGICAL UNDERSTANDING: THE RE-UNION ACADEMY OF FULDA

This reunion project began at a time when the Protestant willingness to actively tolerate Catholics had begun to decrease and slowly gave way to a vibrant anti-Catholicism that lasted well into the twentieth century. Nevertheless, the intellectual climate was still friendly enough to motivate the Protestant Erfurt scholar Jakob Heinrich Gerstenberg (1712–1776) to publish his thoughts about a possible reunion with the Catholic Church in 1773. Surprisingly, he had been intrigued by Johann Friedrich Bahrdt’s (1713–1775) universalism insofar as it attempted to come to a purely rational Christian theology, which all denominations could share. Such an attempt was in Gerstenberg’s eyes necessary in order to protect Christianity against the forces of atheism and desism. Among his personal friends and supporters was the Catholic sovereign of Erfurt, the future archbishop of Mainz and then vice-regent of Erfurt, Carl Theodor von Dalberg (1744–1817). Dalberg was also devoted to the unity of Christianity and publicly declared in his Reflections on the Universe (1778), very much to the dismay of his Jewish correspondent Moses Mendelssohn (1729–1786), who believed that “religious pluralism, not uniformity was the design of Providence,” that all societies, including religions, aim at unity in God.

Orten als anstößig und wohl gar denen im Reich gebilligten Kirchen und Religionen zuwider angesehen werden will."

31. Olaf Blaschke, “Das 19. Jahrhundert: Ein zweites konfessionelles Zeitalter?” Geschichte und Gesellschaft 26 (2000) 38–75. Manuel Borutta has argued that Protestant Enlighteners viewed the Catholic South of Germany very much like the Orient—a region that had to be cultivated, and speaks therefore of a Protestant “Orientalism” as basis for the renewed anti-Catholicism (Manuel Borutta, Antikatholizismus: Deutschland und Italien im Zeitalter der europäischen Kulturkämpfe (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2010)).


This unity, he perceived, was best embodied in the Catholic Church and therefore he expressed his hope that "the time will come when the light of religion will be preached to all humans of the earth without exception... Be it that the desire of good hearts be fulfilled! May the different Christian religious parties (Religionspartheyes) return to the motherly lap of the Church!"\(^{36}\) Two years later he composed a *Plan for a Reunification of Religions* which he sent to his friend Johann Gottfried Herder (1744–1803), the text of which is unfortunately lost.\(^{37}\) Also, other Catholics like the Franciscan Jacob Berthold (1738–1817) in Bamberg argued that mutual denominational tolerance was insufficient but that a real reunion of the churches was desirable.\(^{38}\) However, only the plan of the Benedictine Beda Mayr (1742–1794), who proposed in 1777/78 an academy for the reunification of the churches, caused a stir among his peers because he suggested a restriction of ecclesiastical infallibility.\(^{39}\) In contradistinction to Mayr, five Benedictines of Fulda under the leadership of the Reformed theologian Johann Rudolph Piderit (1720–1791) began to work on a reunification academy the same year, which deserves more serious attention.\(^{40}\) It was inspired by the works of Gerstenberg and Dalberg.

The project leaders among the Benedictines were Peter Böhm (1747–1822) and Karl von Piesport (1716–1800).\(^{41}\) Piderit, however, seems to have been the main author of the statutes of the *Reunion Academy* and its theological plans. The main idea of this group was similar to that of Neuwied: An academic society for the purpose of a reunification of the three main churches should be founded. Just as at the Imperial Cameral Court, one aimed at strict parity. Besides Piesport (Böhm was an extraordinary member), other members included the Lutheran theologians Wilhelm Franz Walch (1726–1784) and Christian Wilhelm Schneider (1734–1797), while the Reformed were represented by Heinrich Otto Duysing (1719–1781).
and Piderit and Petrus Abresch (1735–1812). Members were sought out through private letters and conversations. From the Catholic side one could find the support of Johann Gertz (1744–1824), one of the first exegetes who tried to implement historical criticism, but most Catholics were hesitant since the recent censoring and punishment of modernizing theologians deterred them. The statutes of the new society were finished by April 1779. Also, Johannes Schmitt, a dogmatic theologian from Mainz, of whom nothing else is known, was asked to join, since he had greatly sympathized with the plan. Even the Mainz Archbishop Friedrich von Erthal (1718–1802) seemed to sympathize with the newly created society or at least paid careful attention to the plan when he received Schmitt and Böhm in private audience in 1780. Erthal even ordered Schmitt to inform the Elector of the Palatinate, Karl Theodor (1742–1799), of the society. The Elector’s advisor, however, prelate Johann Kasimir Häffelin (1737–1827), vehemently rejected it and finally motivated Schmitt also to withdraw his support. Häffelin, a seasoned diplomat, could not imagine that the project of a few theologians could really bring about change, let alone theological alterations. Other enlightened theologians also declined membership, mostly because they feared wasting time if the discussions were not supported by any ecclesial authorities. Other concerned Catholic theologians complained to the papal nuncio about the new academy and feared that the project gave up essentials of Catholic teaching. Nuncio Giuseppe Garampi (1725–1792) wondered what common basis the three denominations could have in case of a reunion, “a Catholic, a heretical one or newly invented devilish invention.” He went so far as to protest at the Imperial Chancery in Vienna in 1780 against the Fulda plan. The chancery, however, decided to request reports about the activities of Böhm and Piderit but not to intervene, not even when Garampi warned about potential “seditious” consequences of a reunion of the churches. The nuncio’s fear was increased by the sympathy important Catholic church leaders, especially the Archbishop-Electors of Trier and Mainz but also the Prince Abbot of St. Blasien, showed towards the reunion plan. The Curia

42. Ibid., 162–63.
now acted promptly. On 10 June 1780 Pope Pius VI issued a secret brief that admonished the monks to abstain from their plans since all previous ecumenical dialogues had been unsuccessful. Moreover, the pope warned about the danger of receiving theological knowledge from Protestant theologians. It could destroy the faith of the Benedictine monks, he feared. Finally, the pontiff insisted that the Benedictines had no proper authority for their ecumenical endeavor. The Bishop of Fulda, simultaneously Abbot of Fulda, was ordered to stop the project immediately. Heinrich VIII of Bibra (1759–1788) was a man of the Enlightenment, but he obeyed. Nevertheless, he did not punish his Cathedral Chapter, consisting only of Benedictine monks, which outright rejected the papal decree and wanted to go ahead with the academy plan. He was pleased with so much self-confidence and allowed the monks to appeal directly to Rome. The pope, of course, never responded to the appeal, which only confirmed Böhm’s conviction that the brief had been written not by the Bishop of Rome but by the “archenemy” of Christianity.45

The last resort of the academy to gain support was to do so by publishing its plan. Piderit as a Reformed Christian was not bound by any papal proscription and went ahead with this plan. The publication in 1781 really stirred up broad interest.46 Most readers, however, associated the new academy with the universalist project of Neuwied or the rationalism of Bahrdt.47 Piderit responded that everybody who actually read the plan of the new academy would see that they were not at all interested in “uniting all religions by suppressing the name of Jesus.”48 Instead, the academy aimed at a reunion without giving up the essentials of Christianity and


46. Johann Piderit, Entwurf zum Versuche einer zwischen den streitigen Theilen im Römischen Reiche vorzunehmenden Religions-Vereinigung (Frankfurt and Leipzig: Bayrhoffer, 1781). The plan (Entwurf) was published initially without an introduction so that a few months after the original publication, a new edition was printed with a 141-page-long introduction by Piderit. Idem, Einleitung und Entwurf zum Versuche einer zwischen den streitigen Theilen im Römischen Reiche vorzunehmenden Religions-Vereinigung von verschiedenen Katholischen und Evangelischen Personen, welche sich zu dieser Absicht in eine Gesellschaft verabredet haben (Frankfurt and Leipzig: Bayrboffer, 1781).

47. See, for example, Johann Jakob Moser, Unterthanigstes Gutachten wegen der jezigen Religions-Bewegungen, besonders in der Evangelischen Kirche wie auch über das Kaiserliche Commissionsdecret in der Bahrtscben Sache (n.p.: 1780) 4–5; on the constitutional aspect, ibid., 32–42.

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explicitly despised indifferentism. The mutual dialogues of the academy were not intended to dilute differences but to educate the members. A tolerance that would sacrifice truth claims, a wrong-headed indifferentism, was not the aim of the academy members, Piderit insisted.49 Mutual education about the varying theological traditions would bring about a new, nobler tolerance and finally harmony among faiths:

Tolerance...[combined] with education [Belehrung]...is elevated to a noble level....Tolerance leaves a human person...in uncertainty....Education has the intention to eradicate gradually all prejudices and maxims that hold the heart...captive. If this is achieved, one has harmonious opinions [einerlei Gesinnungen].50

The plan of Piderit and the Benedictines made clear that the members understood the society as a loose congregation of private persons and the academy’s work as private business until a plan was worked out that deserved to be shared with the public.51 The plan invokes already on its first page the Peace of Westphalia, which itself had prescribed a reunion of the Christian faiths. All discussions among members were considered private and no suggestion was supposed to cause any church any disadvantages or advantages until a final decision was reached. The members would discuss whatever was best for a universal church and conducive for a restoration of universal peace between the confessions. If such proceedings were published, they would not be intended to bind any party to them or to force anybody to accept them. Instead, the theologians understood themselves as a think tank for peaceful, interdenominational theology which declared explicitly its trust in divine providence and its conviction of human frailty.52

Only persons who could subscribe to the high ideals of mutual theological education and tolerance and to the uncertainty of the outcome of the project (for example, that one tradition could be utterly wrong) could become members. Every member had to be willing to eradicate error and prejudice, and converse according to “the law of love...and let go of any personal displeasure and to embrace...ways of peace.”53 This brotherly love should become the key to solving confessional disputes, because it

49. Ibid., 141.
50. Ibid., 36–37.
51. Ibid., 4.
52. Ibid., prologue and § 1, 1–6.
53. Ibid., § 3, 9.
demonstrated a deeper commitment, namely that of one's heart to the cause. This did not mean an indifferent embrace of diversity: "Error will remain error and will have to be called as such: a member will always to free ... what is perceived as error an error ... but without slander." Unlike Neuwied, the Piderit-Fulda Project did not seek to establish a universalist religion and did not threaten the interior or exterior constitution of any church. Whatever was passed by the society members in majority vote could never be binding law or oblige any church unless it was officially accepted and implemented by the relevant church authority. It is also remarkable that the members of the society regarded their business as so important that they wanted to disconnect their work from their academic personas so that the "business," working in mutual tolerance and education for a reunion of faiths, would continue until its completion.

Like the Imperial Cameral Court, the society would consist of twelve ordinary members. The ratio of these members according to their confessions, however, was different from the court as six were supposed to be Catholic and six Protestant. Nevertheless, the idea of an itio in partes of two separate bodies is explicitly invoked when it is stated that doctrinal differences among Protestants should be handled solely among them. A reunion should only come about as the result of a search for truth. Therefore the members should regard themselves as "servants" in the vineyard of God and should be ready to suffer for the cause. Although it was left up to the confessional groups how they wanted to name and appoint members, the statutes demonstrate great sensitivity when they state that before a member was appointed the other members were to be informed so it would be clear if anybody had something against this person. Only

54. Ibid., § 4, 11.
55. Ibid., § 6, 14: "Nach allem diesem, was bisher angeführt worden, versteht es sich von selbst, dass diese vorläufige brüderliche Vereinigung, in der inneren und äusseren Verfassung einer jeden Kirche, keine weitere Aenderung oder Irrung mache."
56. Ibid., § 6, 14: "Alles dasjenige, was in dieser Vereinigungs-Gesellschaft genehmigt, und mit der wahren christlichen Religion genehmigt, und mit der wahren christlichen Religion übereinstimmend, oder der gesammten Christlichen Kirche, nützlich und nothwendig erkannt wird, kann niemalen reichsgesetzmässig, niemalen ganzen Gemeinden und Kirchen verbindlich werden, als bis solches unter dem Ansehen derjenigen, welche hierin etwas vestzustellen [sic], und zu verordnen das Recht haben, auf eine sich rechtfertigen lassende Weise, für ganze Kirchen und Gemeinden ist eingeführt worden."
57. Ibid., § 8, 17.
58. Ibid., § 10, 23.
59. Ibid., § 10, 24.
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if nobody objected could the appointment be made. Another paragraph
speaks explicitly of the “good friendly harmony” (gutes, freundliches
Einverständnis)\(^\text{60}\) between the members, which sounds very much like the
constitutional principle of an amicabilis compositio (friendly compromise)
of the Imperial Diet or the statutes of the Cameral Court about friendly in-
teraction. Every new member had to sign an oath in which he professed to
accept the suggestions of the academy and to be a “loving co-worker of the
savior.”\(^\text{61}\) Once all slots of the society were filled, the oldest two members, a
Protestant and a Catholic, would preside as presidents of the academy for
one year. On the Protestant side a member of the other confession could
be appointed co-president, especially if important discussions pertained
to the theological heritage of this group; for example, if a Lutheran were
president, a Reformed could be co-president and full president the follow­
ing year, and so on. Since the presidents would not meet in person, the
statutes prescribed one real presider among the presidents, an office that
was to alternate between Catholics and Protestants.\(^\text{62}\)

Most important, however, was that every member worked “in true
fear of God, through prayer, holy obedience and sacrifice of one’s heart
to the faithful guidance of our Savior and the Spirit he has given us, so
that everything a member does can be regarded a real fruit of the spirit of
Christ.”\(^\text{63}\) While unanimity was required for the ultimate solution of
doctrinal issues, for other questions, for example, themes to work on,
a simple majority of vote was considered sufficient. This majority was
not just the majority of simple votes. Majority meant for the society the
amount of votes which showed most consensus even if, taken together,
the actual number of votes was smaller. It was measured according to the
grade of consensus; only common votes [vereinigte Stimmen] counted!
“According to this principle four Catholics and four Protestants who vote
for one solution count more than six Protestants and two Catholics, or six
Catholics and two Protestants.”\(^\text{64}\) The doctrinal question that should be
investigated was then handed over to a Catholic and a Protestant so that
they could write up how this issue was treated in their respective theolo-
gical traditions. Their statements had to be checked by their churches and

\(^{60}\) Ibid., § 13, 33.

\(^{61}\) Ibid., § 12, 31.

\(^{62}\) Ibid., § 15, 34-52.

\(^{63}\) Ibid., § 18, 62.

\(^{64}\) Ibid., § 19, 73. Spehr’s description that a “majority vote” decided the themes of
the discussion is insufficient, see Spehr, Aufklärung und Ökumene, 223.
authorized. It was crucial that such a statement be based only on approved theological sources an definitive theological judgments, and not on theological school opinions. Two other appointed members of the society then read these documents to find where they agreed and disagreed. The result was shared with the other members, and if nobody objected the “real business” began. Since the differences between the confessions were now clearly stated, the statements could now go to the respective denominational camps for discussion as to how to the doctrinal difference could be resolved. When the issue at question did not pertain to the basic beliefs of either confession, then the camps could reach a compromise and would attempt to enlighten each other in friendship and love over time, but were not to waste time in heated discussions or let a minor issue, even if it was considered an error, impede a reunion. It were, however, also possible that one side considered an issue as minor while the other considered it as shaking the foundations of their church.

As we saw above, the idea to use the power of corporate reason, an academy, for resolving theological differences was not new. However, Böhm and Piderit had learned from the temptation of indifferentism that brought the academy of Neuwied down, as well as from the failures of the constitutional institutions to suspend judgment on theological truth and instead resolve problems pragmatically. Like the judges of the Imperial Cameral Court, the theologians of the academy had to agree on a common constitution. While for the judges it was predominantly the Peace of Westphalia, for the academy members it was the Bible in its Hebrew and Greek original, but as a concession to Catholics the Vulgate was also accepted. Piderit and Böhm thought that such a biblical approach would

65. Ibid., § 22, 84–87.
eliminate excessive doctrinal differences, "false mysticism, enthusiasm and fanaticism."68 Like the judges, the theologians were supposed to be free in their judgment and should come from different German states so that no sovereign could overly influence or pressure the outcome of the discussions. Like the Neuwied Academy, the members of the Fulda Academy rejected personal meetings and preferred written correspondence.69 Likewise, each theological tradition had to express its teachings in a creedal statement, which was supposed to be forwarded to the other members as a foundation for the dialogues. From such documents the theological differences could be derived, themes identified and difficulties resolved. Only the Catholic members sent their creedal statement, namely the *Professio Tridentina* (1565), in 1782. The monks, however, never received an answer or a similar document from their Protestant peers. It was this lack of cooperation and not papal interference that ultimately killed the project in 1783.

**CONCLUSION**

The Neuwied and Fulda projects testify to the fact that there were two fundamentally different ways of ecumenical dialogue in eighteenth-century Germany. While Neuwied aimed at a universalist union by means of a smallest common denominator, the Fulda project saw mutual understanding of creedal traditions as the key to theological harmony. By shedding light on such ecumenical projects of the past, I do not propose that contemporary ecumenical theologians can learn from the past how to shape the theological future but rather that historical theology improves our sensitivity to the fact that we are standing in a cloud of witnesses whose successes and failures we should remember in order to sharpen our self-reflection. When I encountered the statutes of the Fulda Academy for the first time and read about its desire to have true servants of Christ as

68. Spehr, *Aufklärung*, 226; cf. 230. However, if the Vulgate deviated from the original, the Protestants were allowed to use the original text for a rebuttal. Other sources besides scripture were not to be used or only to a minimum. In view of understanding a biblical passage, explanations of the Fathers were admissible and even regarded as "witnesses of truth."

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its members, who are also willing to suffer for the truth, the first person that I could associate with such a model theologian was Ralph Del Colle. His search for truth, his love of Christ, and his willingness to suffer the consequences of his belief in humility and joy have made him a theologian I daily look up to for inspiration.