

Editorial

Ted Koontz

E editing this collection of essays on peace has been inspiring because of the abundance of worthy topics and authors I could imagine including. As I look back on peace-related developments occurring within my lifetime among Christians, and among Mennonites in particular, I am filled with amazement and gratitude.

Mennonites in North America emerged from World War II with a strong peace commitment that focused heavily (though not exclusively) on refusing military service. This commitment was unpopular and sometimes costly, *and* it was challenged by many within our churches.¹ This understanding of peace—as *at least* refusing to kill and *mostly* as refusing to kill—had been central for Mennonites and other groups known as peace churches throughout the centuries. This understanding of peace remains strong.

But since the 1940s—as North American Mennonites became more integrated into and more influential in our societies; as the pressure of a military draft ended; and as biblical, theological, and ethical thinking evolved (now more frequently engaging those from other Christian traditions)—attention and energy shifted from the “negative” act of refusing to kill to the positive (or proactive) tasks of peacemaking and peacebuilding. This shift, and the increasing sophistication characteristic of Mennonite scholarly work in peace theology, is reflected in Willard Swartley’s essay here. He stresses biblical texts and theological themes supporting nonviolence or nonretaliation as central to Christian commitment to peace, while also giving attention to a more comprehensive view of peace as *shalom* present throughout the biblical canon.

That more active understanding of peace has accompanied and supported a flourishing of peacemaking initiatives. Reinterpretations (such as those by Arnold Snyder in these pages) of themes from the Anabaptist beginnings of Mennonite tradition—including their gifts and their limitations—have challenged the viability

and the faithfulness of a sharp (especially sociological) church/world divide. Arnold also points to the centrality of spirituality, of staying connected to the life-giving (sap of the) vine of Jesus, for those who would be Christian peacemakers.

When I began imagining what this issue of *Vision* might include, I thought of many expressions of peace theology—with roots in the Bible and growing out of five centuries of Anabaptist/Mennonite tradition—that have emerged since World War II. I imagined essays about that branching out. But as I thought further and as others contributed thoughts, I experienced the downside of an abundance of possible topics and authors: pain because I could not include everything that should be included!

How could an issue on peace for *Vision* in 2013 fail to include such topics, movements, and themes as, for example, justice for women; antiracism work; development efforts to address poverty; revolutionary violence aimed at bringing about justice; witness to governments; Christian Peacemaker Teams; pioneering work in mental health; interfaith dialogue; just policing, just peacemaking, and responsibility to protect as alternative ways of thinking about Christians and violence; help for soldiers who become conscientious objectors; efforts to deal with domestic and sexual abuse; making peace with the natural world; teaching and practicing mediation and other conflict transformation skills in contexts of direct violence within or among nations; immigration; opening conversations with military folks on nonviolent or less violent ways to defend peace/justice; the emergence of peace studies programs at our schools . . .

In the end I chose to include essays on a sampling of worthy and relatively well-developed initiatives: restorative justice (Lorraine Stutzman Amstutz); conflict transformation at a congregational level (Betty Pries); ecumenical engagement related to peace (Hans Ulrich Gerber); and (a particular window into) efforts to heal wounds caused as native peoples were shoved aside by European settlers (Eileen Klassen Hamm). While a good deal of work has been done in these arenas, the essays point to the opportunities and need for further work. Shalom has not yet arrived, even where faithful people have been at work!

I also chose to make room for a reflective essay (Alain Epp Weaver's) on the relationship between peace theology and the

practice of peacebuilding. Broadening our understanding of peace, teaching about how to build peace, and creating programs to promote peace call for engagement with social sciences and with people who hold all kinds of commitments. Alain explores ways our commitments to peace translate into language that is readily understood and valued by those with many theological or philosophical starting points—and ways our theology may not be easily translated. And he asks (respectfully) whether our emphasis on peace might tempt us to substitute it for the much richer gospel of Jesus Christ.

I also wanted to include essays dealing with frontiers in peace thinking and acting. Jason Boone asks us to consider whether peace church communities might have a role in helping heal wounds—moral injuries, in particular—that have been suffered by veterans (who often are also victims of war). Joel Kauffmann reflects on his work in taking a Christian peace message outside the comfortable confines of churches and church institutions, through popular media such as cartoons and films. Nekeisha Alexis-Baker tells her story as a (relatively) new Mennonite, and challenges us to move further in rooting out racism and sexism—and argues that taking our peace theology seriously means refusing to raise and kill animals in order to eat them.

Finally, I wanted to include personal stories. Both Joel's and Nekeisha's contributions include this element while also dealing with particular topics. The final essay by Samantha Lioi is the testimony of another new-ish Mennonite. It offers evidence that telling and living a Christian gospel that is not shy about stressing peace does not necessarily put people off. It can indeed be good news, inviting others to journey with a Christian peace church and contribute to its ongoing growth and transformation.

Note

¹ In most instances here and in the essays that follow, “North American Mennonites” and similar terms refer primarily to groups that are now part of Mennonite Church Canada and Mennonite Church USA. Approximately 40 to 50 percent of young men drafted from the bodies that now make up these churches accepted some form of military service in World War II.

About the editor

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