Editorial

Karl Koop

We live in a world where military conflicts seem to be intensifying. After the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, there was much optimism that the world had become a safer place, but since then wars have been on the rise—with an increasing number of soldiers and civilians dying and millions of people experiencing loss of home and necessities of life. In looking to the future, it seems that the best that we can hope for is to muddle through and try to avoid the worst of catastrophes.

Do Mennonites have new insights about what it means to work for peace, both at home and abroad?

Christians have frequently insisted that war is terrible and wrong but have often pointed out that it may be a necessary evil and that under certain conditions it is justifiable. Anabaptists, along with other peace churches, have countered, arguing that all of life is sacred, and, because of the incarnation, cross, and resurrection, war is always wrong. Christians must practice nonresistance and work actively toward building peace. The Christian life is about following Jesus, imitating Christ, living a life of discipleship, and holding firm to Jesus's teachings and example—the one who called on his followers to not resist evil (Matthew 5:39).

Peace traditions have not always been clear about what a peace witness entails, and since the mid-twentieth century attitudes in some Mennonite circles have evolved. There has been a shift away from an ethic of quiet nonresistance toward an emphasis on engagement with the world and a commitment to active peacebuilding that includes resisting evil while maintaining an ethic of nonviolence.

In recent times, Mennonites have begun to deal with violence closer at hand and have sought to address issues related to racism, domestic violence, and sexual abuse in the context of work, school, church, and home. Considering these issues and the conversations that have ensued, the question arises: Do Mennonites have new insights about what it means to work for peace, both at home and abroad? A few of the articles in this issue begin to shed light on this question.

The issue opens with a contribution by Paul Doerksen who addresses the awkwardness of being a pacifist. He notes the various challenges of holding a minority position but nevertheless feels called to trust the vision displayed in the Bible—a vision of peace that God will one day bring to reality.

Yet what happens when we encounter passages that seem to contradict this vision? Five biblical scholars—Sheila Klassen-Wiebe, Sunder John Boopalan, Derek Suderman, Mary Schertz, and Alicia Batten—bravely tackle violent texts in the Bible and tell us how they come to terms with these passages. Layton Friesen's essay that follows offers an additional perspective by suggesting that the doctrine of nonresistance that Anabaptists have held for centuries may point the way forward, recognizing the importance of Christ's peace within "the great providential rule of God" that includes acts of justice and judgment.

From here, the issue offers various perspectives on the practices of peacebuilding. Esther Epp-Tiessen shares epiphanies from her journey with Mennonite Central Committee and identifies new insights and challenges. Janna Hunter-Bowman examines the experiences of women peacebuilders in Columbia, which suggest that peace workers need to take seriously power dynamics in situations of conflict. Rose Marie Berger, a founding member of the Catholic Nonviolence Initiative and senior editor at *Sojourners* magazine, writes about recent Roman Catholic affirmations of nonviolence—an implicit reminder that the Roman Catholic Church also has a peace tradition. Jonny Rashid addresses the highly conflicted region of Israel-Palestine to reflect on the implications of whether and how to take sides in the conflict, considering that both parties in the conflict have experienced horrific oppression. Andrea Cramer founded a post-resettlement nonprofit and shares some of her varied and illuminating experiences with refugees and asylum seekers who are fleeing the violence of war.

The final contributions take a more meditative turn. Kevin Derksen offers a sermon for Peace Sunday, drawing on Acts 15 and Ephesians 2 while reflecting on hostages and the living hell that war emanates. Anneli Loepp Thiessen and Ingrid Loepp Thiessen reflect on a funeral experience interwoven with thoughts on the hymn "So Nimm Denn Meine Hände" (So take my hands) that has accompanied a segment of the Mennonite experience affected by intergenerational trauma. Julian Waldner contemplates our most basic need—to come home—and finds it in the

work of joy and in the here and now. Carol Penner closes by offering prayers for a church and world that longs for peace.

What does Christian hope look like, and from where does it come? In this season of precarious uncertainty, I am reminded of Henri Nouwen's reference to hope's grounding:

> *Important for me is not if our civilization will survive or not but if we can continue to live with hope, and I really think we can because our Lord has given us His promise that He will stay with us at all times. He is the God of the living, He has overcome evil and death and His love is stronger than any form of death and destruction. That is why I feel that we should continually avoid the temptation of despair and deepen our awareness that God is present in the midst of all the chaos that surrounds us and that that presence allows us to live joyfully and peacefully in a world so filled with sorrow and conflict.*[1]

May it be so.

About the author

Karl Koop is professor of history and theology at Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

1 Henri J. M. Nouwen, *Love, Henri: Letters on the Spiritual Life*, edited with a preface by Gabrielle Earnshaw (Convergent, 2016), 45.