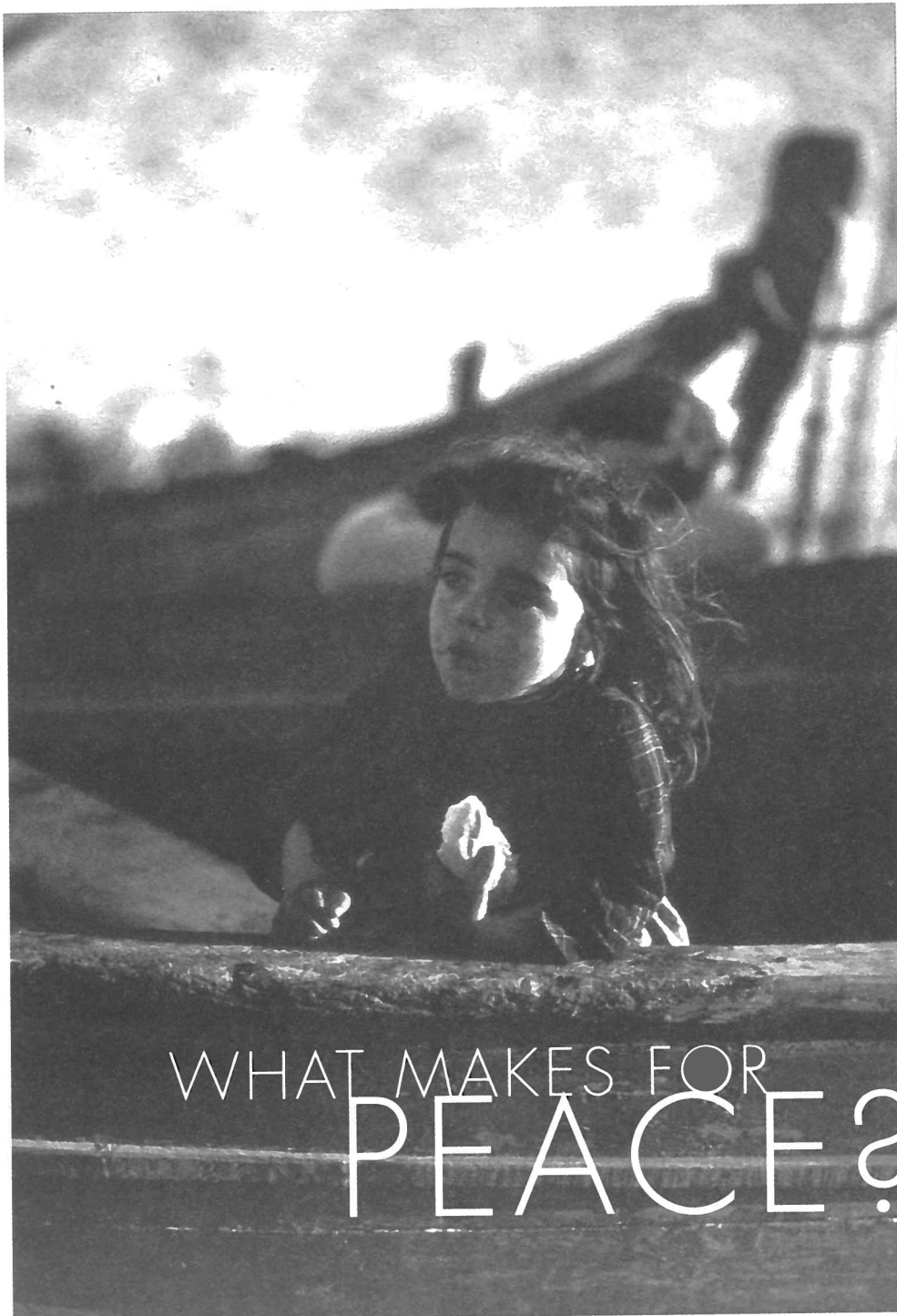


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SOPHIA

W I S D O M

Say to Wisdom, "You are my sister." Proverbs 7:4a



WHAT MAKES FOR
PEACE?

VOLUME 13 ■ NUMBER 2 ■ SUMMER 2003

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SOPHIA

A Greek feminine noun associated with the biblical wisdom tradition, translated "wisdom" and personified in the book of Proverbs; equivalent in the New Testament to *logos*, the creative word that was with God in the beginning, creating and giving life to the world.

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Estér DeFehr, *Publisher*

Lori Matties, *Editor*

Hanny Labun, *Circulation*

Esther Reimer, *treasurer*

Christine Enns

Tina Fehr Kehler

Mary Friesen

Jean Reimer

Lis Vensel

Layout/Design

Darrell Dyck, *Pegasus Design*

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SOPHIA

P.O. Box 28062

RPO North Kildonan

Winnipeg, MB R2G 4E9

fax: (204) 668-2527

e-mail: lmatties@shaw.ca

phone: (204) 339-5668

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SOPHIA Mission Statement

Sophia offers a forum for Christian women to speak to one another about the joys and challenges of living faithfully in an uncertain, changing world. Its pages give voice to women's stories – their experiences in church and society, family and workplace, their aspirations and disappointments, their successes and failures. It invites expressions of joy and sorrow, concern and outrage. In doing so it hopes to affirm women in their quest for spiritual, emotional and physical wholeness and for the full expression of their gifts in all spheres of life.

Sophia was conceived and brought to birth by Mennonite Brethren women and celebrates Christian sisterhood. Its desire is to welcome differing voices. It hopes to challenge women and men of all ages as they live together in Christian community. The name SOPHIA (wisdom) expresses our desire to search and know the wisdom of God through the Scriptures and our experience as followers of Jesus Christ.

Sophia acknowledges the authority of God, the giver of wisdom, and of the sacred Scriptures, the story of God's dealings with women and men. "Oh the depths of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God!" (Romans 11:33).



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EDITORIAL

What Makes for Peace?

by Lori Matties

Just before Mother's Day I received an email from a friend containing a review of a book written about the massacre that took place in Jenin, West Bank, in April 2002. For several days, the Israeli army systematically went through many buildings, searching for and killing so-called terrorists. When it was over, the world saw on the news piles of rubble, dead bodies and people crying out in mourning for their lost ones. There were rumours, also, of a mass grave and allegations of war crimes committed by the Israeli army. The United Nations went in to inspect, but as I recall the results were vague and inconclusive.

The book, *Searching Jenin: Eyewitness Accounts of the Israeli Invasion*, by Ilan Pappé, an Israeli, tells the story through interviews with residents of Jenin and shares the horror they have lived through in the year since the invasion. As I read the review I was struck deeply by the descriptions of mothers who had to try to pick up the pieces after an unspeakable horror; how they recounted matter-of-factly that their children were having nightmares, haunted day and night by their memories of the atrocities they witnessed. One particular story was of a young woman named Sana, whose husband was murdered on their doorstep, who later gave birth to a baby girl and named her Zuhur, which means "Flowers." Such a name in such a time is both defiant and hopeful. It refuses to allow the power of the horror around her to determine her dreams for the future or to erase the beauty in her own heart. It reminds me of the flowers that I saw growing

everywhere in the spring of the year we spent living near Bethlehem – poppies and other flowers that sprang up out of the rocky soil – tenacious and delicate signs of beauty in a harsh and scarcely-forgiving land.

My story, as I have lived it over the past several months, watching the world slide into war in Iraq and then try to scramble out the other side of it, is one of ambiguity and some confusion. Not that I have any doubt about my belief in the futility and wrongness of war. Not that I haven't felt anger and anguish about the injustices in the world as I read the Christian Peacemaker Teams reports about their work in Iraq, Hebron, Colombia and Ontario. The ambiguity I feel is about how I can go on living in relative peace and stability here in wealthy North America while my brothers and sisters elsewhere, Christian and otherwise, are suffering by the hands of my own government and corporations I patronize.

I am grateful for the many forms of freedom I enjoy. I am very grateful that my children have so far been able to live in relative safety, and that all of us can carry on the routines of our lives with little interruption or disturbance. At the same time I am frustrated with my seeming helplessness to make a difference for the lives of those in conflict. I am frustrated that, beyond writing a few letters to government representatives and participating in few peace marches, I seem to be voiceless on the subject of how to solve our differences without killing each other.

The events of recent history, like *Searching Jenin*, point up for me again the paradox of gratitude and

righteous indignation that I as a follower of Christ carry with me every day. My identification with the mothers of Jenin, who must find a way to balance the horrors of their experience with their defiant hope for the future, is the birthright of all of us. I need to share the horror as I long to share the hope of a young mother who has the courage to name her child "Flowers" in the midst of the atrocities that surround her. Perhaps then, the two of us, so different in so many ways, will be one enough to gain a stronger voice for an end to the violence that damages all of us.

How we make peace is the question that in some form occupies many of the pages of this issue of *Sophia*. It is answered, in differing ways, with eloquence, whether by personal stories of fasting in solidarity with Iraqi women (Melissa Miller), of working to help repatriate Rwandan refugees (Alison Doerksen), or by exploring biblical passages or modern parables (Mary Anne Isaak, Jean Reimer and Rebecca Yoder Neufeld). There are other stories, too, both thoughtful and humorous, for your summer pleasure. May peace be your companion.

**Searching Jenin: Eyewitness Accounts of the Israeli Invasion* may be obtained through www.palestinebooks.com

Peace to People of Goodwill

by Jean Reimer

On Easter Sunday, into the quietness after the final prayer came the benediction, "Peace to people of goodwill." I was startled, astonished, at this new angle on the old familiar "peace on earth, goodwill to men."

Could this verse truly mean that, I wondered? Indeed it can. In one Greek source (RSV Greek-English NT), Luke 2:14 literally reads, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace *among people of goodwill*." In another source (Green's Hebrew-Greek-English Bible), it reads thus: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, *goodwill among people*."

Surely God's goodwill came to us in Christ, yet the wider power of the angels' paean of praise is that God's peace will make itself known among people of goodwill. Goodwill among people and peace on earth are like the two sides of a coin – inseparably connected, impossible to sever.

The million dollar question is, How do we become people of goodwill? How can goodwill among people be generated?

"The Dayspring from on high will visit us,...to direct our feet into the way of peace." (Luke 1:78,79; Green.)

Jesus taught that it is only what is in our hearts and spirits that will transform enmity and separation into love and unity. And what must be in our hearts and spirits is simply himself, Jesus Christ – simply the presence and work of our Peacemaker from on high. Peace, the end of hatred and conflict, is a spiritual fruit that has to begin with Jesus' life in me: "To be spiritually minded [to set the mind on the Spirit] is life and peace." (Rom.8:6, KJV, RSV)

Violence of any kind is against God's spirit of peace (whether that violence be guns, bombs, bigotry, discrimination, exclusion, financial or emotional or spiritual manipulation, control and abuse in homes, communities, churches and nations). Our feet will not know how to walk the way of peace without the Dayspring of light ruling our hearts. Jesus said as much when he wept over Jerusalem: "If you had known...the things for your peace! But now they were hidden from your eyes,...because you did not perceive the time of your visitation." (Lk.19:42,44; paraphrase from Green)

It is Jesus who will break down the prejudices and clean away the hatreds within us that create and constantly refuel the wars around and between us. To the bitter history

between Jew and Gentile, Paul wrote: "Christ is our living peace. He has made a unity of the conflicting elements of Jew and Gentile by breaking down the barrier which lay between us. By his sacrifice he removed the hostility ... and made utterly irrelevant the antagonism between us. Then he came and told [us] that the war was over. It is through him that both of us now can approach the Father in one Spirit." (Eph.2:14-18, Phillips) Also at the core of the peace process is resistance to the source of enmity, our arch Enemy who destroys peace at every turn: "the God of peace will crush Satan under your feet." (Rom.16:20, Phillips)

"There is no way to peace. Peace is the way," said Mahatma Gandhi, that Great Soul of India, who taught and lived out and died for this belief. He called all of India to solidarity through prayer and firm non-violent resistance to tyranny and prejudice. He understood, in the starkest and most practical of ways, that only a moral and spiritual force can bring about true community and peace. Gandhi was a

Hindu, yet his beliefs embraced and served what are the deepest truths of Jesus Christ – that it is the law of love and sacrifice that truly defeats the evils of violence and hate, that never can the kingdom of liberty be entered with

only lip service to truth and nonviolence (Jeanette Eaton, *Gandhi: Fighter Without a Sword*).

Henri Nouwen (*Seeds of Hope*) also believes that "prayer, resistance, and community are the three core aspects of peace work," but he questions the value of even saying this apart from the essential discovery of the peace of Jesus within us as we seek to become the people God calls us to be. "When those who want peace are as interested in success, popularity, and power as those who want war, what then is the real difference between war and peace?" In addressing this question, Nouwen speaks of the kind of peace the world cannot give, a peace essentially rooted in utter weakness. He tells the story of Adam, a profoundly mentally, physically and emotionally handicapped young man at the Daybreak l'Arche community in Toronto. It was Adam, as Nouwen cared for him, who taught Henri not only about love and shared humanity, but about the essence of peace (pp.193-203).

Adam cannot do, he can only be. Adam taught Henri that "peace is first of all the art of *being*." It is realizing that

Violence of any kind is against
God's spirit of peace.



"Guernica" by Pablo Picasso is often described as the greatest antiwar painting in history. To prop up Franco, the fascist dictator of Spain, German bombers obliterated the small Basque town of Guernica on April 26, 1937. With furious energy, Picasso completed this huge (11' x 25') black and white canvas in two months, and installed it in the Spanish Pavilion at the Paris World's Fair. Key images from left to right are: mother with dead child, bull representing brutality, a fallen warrior, screaming horse, the lightbearer and two fleeing women.

my value depends not on what I do but on what I am; seeing how my strivings for success are marked by rivalry and competition, compulsions and obsessions, suspicion, jealousy, resentment and revenge; letting my familiar ways of controlling my world be stripped away; desiring to do less and be more; discovering an inner at-homeness; learning that "praying is being with Jesus and simply wasting time with Him."

It is, secondly, a peace rooted in the *heart* – "what makes us human is not our minds but our hearts, not our ability to think but our ability to love." Adam taught Henri love, that to be fully human is to have at the centre of our being the God-given capacity to give and receive love. Adam's humanity and love come from a heart broken of all human pride and security, a heart rooted in the love of God for him – the same love that touches us all long before any other relationship. Out of such a heart, the divine peace and love can flow. Such a heart "allows us to enter into relationships and become sons and daughters of God and brothers and sisters of each other."

It is, thirdly, a peace that calls forth *community* – just as Adam's vulnerability calls all his household together as a family, so it will be the weakest among us that will call the motley community of Adam's race to honesty, to mutual need and forgiveness, to affection, to gentleness, to resolution. We can't do life on our own, we can't all have centre seat – no wonder we face a world on the brink of destruction. Our peace will come only as we proclaim to each other the Christ who chose to descend among us in complete weakness and vulnerability, who revealed to us the glory of God, and who provided us with the spiritual

love and light to live in community.

Thus, peace is linked indissolubly to love, to compassion rather than to rejection, to an embrace rather than to a blow. Nouwen tells the story of an old man struggling to rescue a scorpion caught in the roots of a tree in a fast-flowing river. Each time the old man touched the scorpion to bring it to safety, the scorpion stung him. Again and again he tried, until his hands were swollen and bloody. A passerby watched his attempts with the scorpion, and shouted abuse: "What's wrong with you? Only a fool risks his life for the sake of an ugly, useless creature." The old man replied, "Friend, because it is the nature of the scorpion to sting, why should I give up my own nature to save?" (p.125)

Our weakness calls us to keep our eyes on the prince of peace, who didn't cling to his divine power, who refused to turn stones to bread or jump from great heights or rule with power, who died rejected and despised. We are called to continue to trust the one who rose in triumph and lives in our hearts, to bring forth the peace we so desire, even through the very soil of our weak human condition. Nouwen (p.204-5) relates an old Hasidic tale of a rabbi who asked his students, "How can we determine the hour of dawn, when the night ends and the day begins? ... It is when you can look into the face of human beings and you have enough light [in you] to recognize them as your brothers and sisters. Up until then it is night, and darkness is still with us."

.....
Jean Reimer, a member of *Sophia's* editorial committee, lives in Steinbach, MB. She works with Wycliffe Bible Translators.

Fasting for Peace

by Melissa Miller

When word of MCC's Womens' Fast for Peace first reached me, I confess my thoughts turned to how much I love food. I love the varied tastes, textures and colours of food. Much of my identity as friend, daughter, spouse, mother and host is linked to food and the joys it brings. In addition, I have medical reasons to eat well. Prone to chronic migraines I eat regularly because low blood sugar can trigger a migraine. So my initial response to fasting was hesitation.

Such are the confessions of one well-fed North American struggling to give up just a sliver of her wealth of abundant food. With humility, I think of the many people whose struggle for food is overwhelming and often futile.

At the outset of the fast, I could only see deprivation. Three months later I better understand how my material wealth is also my spiritual poverty. I'm grateful for the nudge that pushed me to join. Instead of deprivation, I now see the fast as having deepened me.

Two things tipped my decision. One was an intense desire to work for peace, to do what I could to speak against what I saw as an evil, immoral invasion of Iraq. Second, the fast was organized by my dear friend, Esther Epp-Tiessen. Esther and I have walked a long way together, literally in our neighbourhoods, and symbolically through sharing work, family concerns and friendship. Knowing of Esther's personal losses, I was touched by her visit to Iraq in February 2002 and her stories of how the Gulf War and the subsequent UN sanctions had destroyed Iraqi lives. One particularly graphic story haunted me – a clearly marked "safe" Baghdad bomb shelter where U.S. bombs had incinerated over 400 women and children who had gathered for safety, the outlines of their bodies clearly etched in the shelter's ruins a decade later. In solidarity with such victims, and with awed appreciation for Esther's unflinching compassion, I gathered my meager discipline and committed myself to attempting the fast.

The organizers invited people to fast for twelve hours on Wednesdays. Some fasted for longer or shorter periods of time, or on days other than Wednesdays. My fast typically began early Wednesdays. I ate my normal

I gazed at the faces of those in the newspaper who imagined bombs dropping on their country, or who grieved their shattered loved ones.



KÄTHE KOLLWITZ

"Vienna is Dying! Rescue her Children!" poster by Käthe Kollwitz. An effective voice of protest in the late 1800s, Kollwitz recorded the despair of factory and farm workers, who provided the backbreaking labour that fuelled the Industrial Revolution.

breakfast of one or two pieces of fruit, then sipped only juice or tea until breaking the fast at dinner. I took the initial step, assuming that if headaches were too debilitating, I would discontinue.

I valued the connection with other fasters, women and men, in Winnipeg where I live and elsewhere in North America. Through the web site maintained by MCC, I learned of the 1200 others in Europe, Africa and South America, Christian and Muslim, who joined. I was heartened by many beautiful words of strength and struggle. I am grateful for MCC's leadership.

Increased sensitivity was one of the first changes I noted. I gazed at the faces of those in the newspaper who imagined bombs dropping on their country, or who grieved their shattered loved ones. (I continued my practice of avoiding television news because of its negative effect on my emotions.) I prayed

hard for peace. I wept through worship services, moved to tears by a hymn's refrain or a word of scripture. I confronted my own violent, angry heart. I agonized over my birth country as it fell prey to greed and destruction, betraying its commitment to justice and human rights. I feared my beloved world disintegrating into horrific escalation of human and environmental destruction.

All of this happened, of course, in the backdrop of "normalcy" – walking the dog, shovelling snow, sending flowers to my mom, and squabbling with my family over household chores. Life in its infinite variations goes on.

Some days I became weak, not necessarily physically, though I sometimes had shaky legs or trembling hands, but with a decreased ability to maintain my boundaries. I felt quite tender and sensed life and Spirit merging around me. Paradoxically I seemed to be increasingly grounded or centered in a way that transcended the surface, material world. I occasionally glimpsed a unifying force that linked me to others and to life, almost as if I was settling more into my self, more into Love.

I especially developed compassion for the Iraqi people as they waited for, and then were witnesses to, and destroyed by, crushing American military might. When one woman prayed at a weekly gathering "for our sisters in Iraq, for our nieces and nephews there," my heart leaped, connecting the nieces and nephews of my family with the Iraqis who treasure their loved ones.

The last day of the fast, I met with my spiritual director, Sister Marie, in a dim, cozy basement room at the retreat center. I spoke of the fast and how God had given me strength to carry out my commitment, and deepened my empathy for victims of war. Outside the window, frozen prairie warmed to a generous spring sun. I could only imagine the agony of desert cities where hot, hungry mothers tried to soothe parched, terrified children.

"What kind of God is it that provides such things?" Marie gently queried, referring back to my reflection on fasting.

"Expansive," I answered, almost without thinking. "A God of infinite resources," I continued, meeting her smiling eyes.

The gifts of fasting. Emptying myself of food for a few hours each week created more space to meet an expansive generous God with limitless compassion. A God who was quite willing to fill my space with compassion. Like water seeking its own depth, God's gift came effortlessly as I fasted. Now that the fast has ended, I hope still to be open to meeting that God, still to relinquish my heart to compassion.

.....
Melissa Miller, counsellor and author, operates Family Ties. She is also a part-time MDiv student and a member of Charleswood Mennonite Church in Winnipeg.

They'll

take your soul
and put it in a suit,
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They'll say marriage is easy,
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are all you need
to keep it together.

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your boys need Nikes,
your girls cheerleading,
and all you need is your job
9 to 5 in the same place.

They'll order you never to cry
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and never, ever dance
in the rain.

They'll repeat all the things
your preschool teacher said,
in that squeaky too tight voice.

And when you slowly
let them go,
crack your suit,
ooze your soul
in the sun,
when you run through
the woods with your dog,
read poems to swaying cornfields,
pray in tall red oaks,
they'll whisper,
and pretend you're crazy.

by Cheryl Denise

.....
Cheryl Denise grew up in Elmira, Ontario. She now lives in Philippi, WV, and works as a nurse. She and her husband, Mike Miller, are a part of the Shepherds Field Community and tend a small flock of Jacob sheep.

For a variety of reasons I am more aware of the presence of evil in the world in the year 2003 than I have been before. And so I bring two questions to the Scriptures: 1) How does God deal with Evil in the world? 2) How does God want us to deal with Evil? As I read the story of Genesis, I realize that I am not the only one who is asking questions about evil. The author of Genesis portrays the increasing drama of how evil in world is growing and how God is continually responding to that evil.

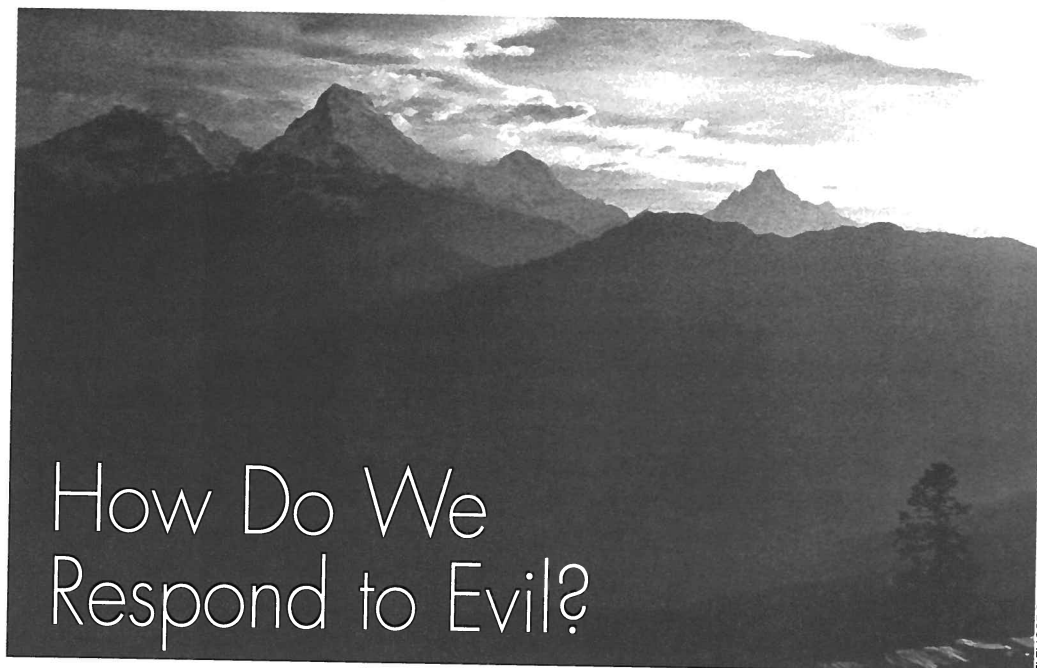
Genesis begins with the perfect harmony of creation. Into this peaceful world we are told of a gradual unfolding of evil – disobedience, anger, murder, revenge seventy-seven fold, sexual boundaries crossed, giants terrorizing the land for centuries. Finally, God has had enough. “The Lord saw that the wickedness of humankind was great in the earth, and every inclination of the thoughts of their hearts was only evil continually” (6:5).

God’s response to the overwhelming evil was not anger, but rather grief. God was “grieved” (6:6). This verb “to grieve” derives from the same Hebrew root as the word, “pain,” used in Genesis 3 when God says to the woman, “in pain (or in grief) you shall bring forth children.”

I have very clear memories of crying out in intense pain at the births of my children. This same intensity of pain is the way God cries out over the wickedness of humanity on earth. Except, in Genesis, these cries do not lead to the thrill of birth as labour pains do. The evil on earth is so painful that God chooses to abort it all and begin again.

As we read the stories of Scripture, it is our task as individuals and as a community to discern how the strands of biblical stories can be woven together with the threads of our own stories. When I reflect on the situation in 2003 it seems to me that, either consciously or unconsciously, the government of the United States has identified with the role of God in the story of the flood, while understanding that Saddam Hussein played the role of humanity.

Weaving this interpretation of current events into Genesis 6:5-7 then could sound like this:



The American government saw that the wickedness of Saddam Hussein was great in the earth, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. And the American leaders were sorry that they had allowed Saddam to remain on the earth, and it grieved them to their heart. So the American government said, “We will blot out from the earth Saddam Hussein—together with collateral damage of animals and creeping things and birds of the air, for we are sorry that we have allowed the situation to get this bad.”

In the current context, I have no doubt that the American government believed that they, like God, truly desired to reestablish peace on earth. The American government, like God, has tried restrictions of all kinds. In Genesis God also began with restrictions against evil: banishing Adam and Eve from the Garden of Eden and from the tree of life, cursing the ground, alienating Cain from society, causing him to become a wanderer on the earth, reducing the average life span by several centuries. None of these restrictions effectively reduced the evil. And so God decided on a new solution – regime change. “Noah found favour in the sight of the Lord” (6:8).

When such great evil threatened the very security of the earth, and when restrictions didn’t work, what other choice did God have in order to create lasting peace on earth? When such great evil threatened our homeland security, and when restrictions didn’t work, what other choice did the government of America have in order to create lasting peace on earth? So, in the Genesis story God declared war on humanity, employing the universal flood, a terrifying weapon of mass destruction, but making provision for

Noah, the new God-ordained progenitor of humanity.

Finally, after a year of receding water and regrowth, relieved people and animals tumbled out of the ark to rebuild a peaceful and pristine world. Happy forever after. Evil eradicated. Right? Wrong!

Immediately after the people set foot on the green earth, God said, with sober realization, "The inclination of the human heart is evil from youth" (8:21). In other words, regime change didn't work. Eradicating evil people from the face of the earth did not, in fact, eradicate the evil. A sneak peak to the continuing saga of Noah, the brave new world leader, shows Noah making poor choices, exposing himself to shame, uttering the first human curse in history, and providing the rationale for centuries of slavery and domination.

This is the context in which we find ourselves today. This is the context for God's promise of a rainbow. At the end of the flood, after weapons of mass destruction and after regime change, God admits that eliminating evil people will never eliminate evil from the human heart.

But God does not throw up God's hands and say to humanity, "I give up. I've tried everything. Just go ahead and live with your evil." At the point of despair, this is when God offers a rainbow of glorious hope.

The rainbow offers hope because with it God establishes a radical covenant with Noah, with all humanity, and with all other living creatures on earth. God promises, "Never, never again, will I use weapons of mass destruction to try to get rid of evil. No matter what you do, no matter how evil you are, I will not destroy."

This is *not* a mutual covenant. God does not declare that *if* people work at being good, *then* God will also work at maintaining peace. This is *not* a covenant based on conditions. This is a one-sided, unconditional covenant of peace. God is the only one doing the promising.

And herein is the hope of the rainbow. In the context of extreme violence and corruption that destroy the world, God begins to break the power of evil by establishing an unconditional covenant of self-restriction that leads to peace.

There are a few questions we need to ask about the covenant of the rainbow to help us understand its impact. First, does the rainbow, God's promise of self-restriction, indicate that an unconditional covenant of peace will solve the problem of evil immediately? No. Not at all.

God does not attempt to produce a quick fix to the problem of evil. And we don't have to either. God models a long-range solution that aims at trust and transformation of the heart.

Second, does the rainbow, God's covenant, indicate that an unconditional covenant of peace will provide com-

plete security in the face of evil? No. Not at all.

The fact is that evil is extremely costly to creation. Thus all solutions to the problem of evil are extremely costly as well. Fighting evil with destruction always costs many lives. And resisting evil without destruction costs many lives as well. In fact, God's unconditional covenant of peace cost the life of God's very own Son. One way or another evil will exact its cost.

When Gandhi led a non-violent revolution against unjust domination in South Africa and again in India, he was clear that confronting evil would cost lives, but the lives that it would cost would be their own and not their enemies. Thus there was, not just conquering, but transformation of the evil systems.

Third, does the rainbow, God's covenant, indicate that an unconditional promise to resist evil without using destruction will be effective in moving the world toward peace? Yes. Absolutely and increasingly so.

God's long range solution to evil is not a static covenant. It is an ever-growing salvation, increasingly incorporating more people, more of creation, more trust and more peace. God's way of dealing with evil progresses from a one-way covenant of peace, to a two-way mutual

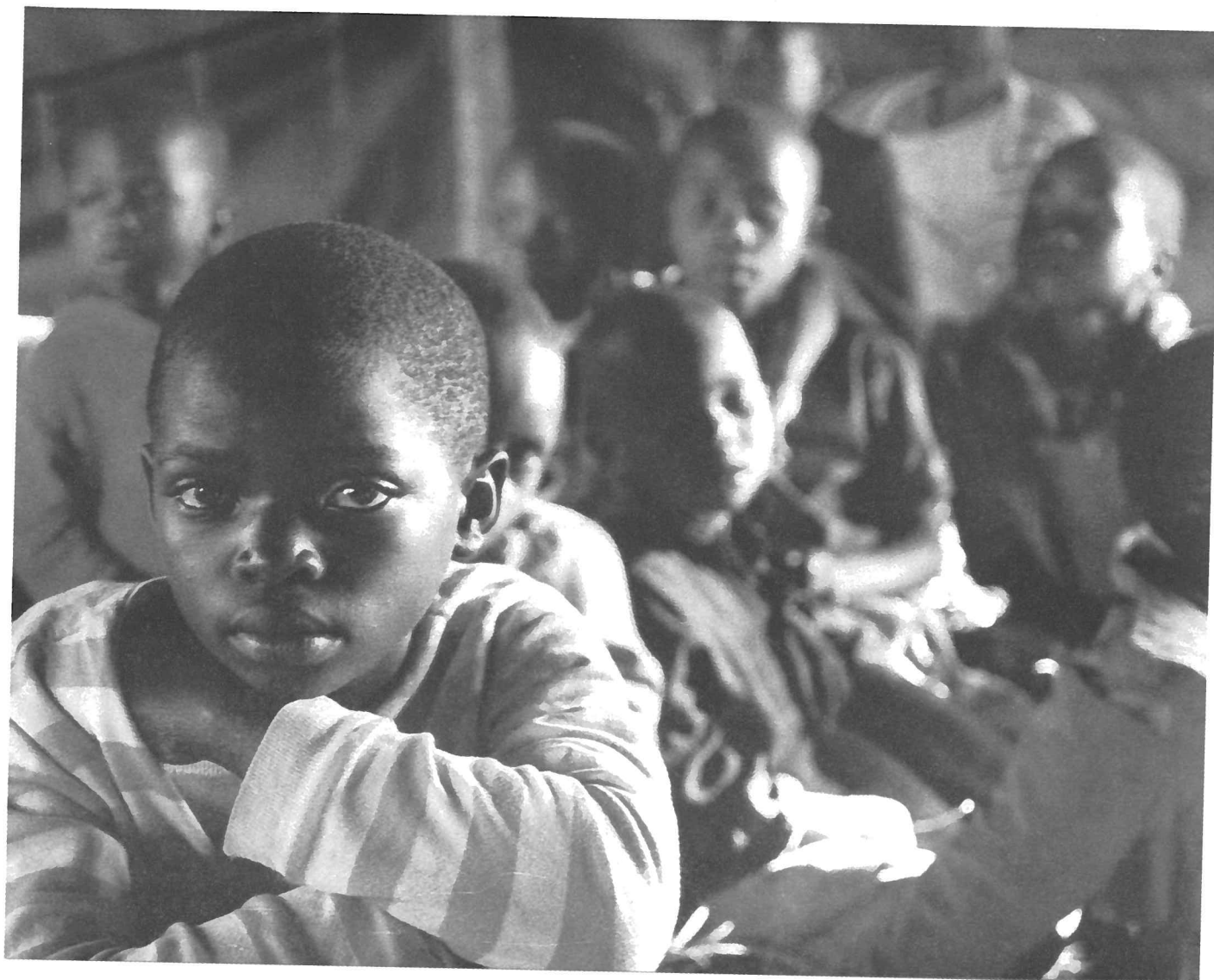
covenant with a distinct group of people, to a two-way mutual covenant open to all who want to enter, to a conquering of the power of evil and death, and, eventually, to a new heaven and a new earth. This is a solution that the flood could never offer.

In the current context, I have no doubt that the American government believed that they, like God, truly desired to reestablish peace on earth.

We all face evil, or a diluted form of evil, in contexts that impact the daily routines of our lives. Whatever the evil we face, we have a choice to live in the pre-rainbow world where violence and destruction are the tools we use to combat that evil. Or we have a choice to live in the light of the rainbow according to God's promise that evil can be faced and transformed by the power of love. By living with an unconditional, self-sacrificing commitment to peace we become partners with God moving toward the multi-coloured vision of a new heaven and a new earth.

In the context of evil that destroys the world, God begins to break the power of evil by establishing an unconditional covenant of self-restriction that leads to peace. May God help us live as God chooses to live, in the strength of the rainbow.

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Mary Anne Isaak serves on the pastoral team at College Community Church Mennonite Brethren in Clovis, California. She and her husband, Jon, have two children, 11 and 13 years of age.



Reflections on Rwanda

The following are excerpts from notes Alison Doerksen took in response to her experience in Rwanda in November 1996, during the massive repatriation of Rwandan refugees, returning home. Alison was working with a non-governmental organization in the town of Gisenyi, close to the border with Zaire, now Democratic Republic of Congo. These notes accompanied a series of photographs Alison took, which were part of "Surviving Pacifism," an exhibition of artwork by her mother, Agatha Doerksen, at the Mennonite Heritage Gallery in Winnipeg, November 2001 to January 2002.

by Alison Doerksen

Look, here's a map of Africa, and Rwanda is a tiny yellow shape somewhere in the centre. Around are islands of blue, the Great Lakes. And closer up all is green, every possible piece of land is claimed and cultivated, even the strips along the roadsides. An approaching storm flattens out the whole surrounding area, hiding the fullness of the sky, making each duck for shelter. There are hills everywhere, they make everything feel close and they are each divided and subdivided and divided again into a multiplicity of small fields, some with different colours or shades of green than the next. The hilltops wear small tree-hats, some of the last remaining forest. The people are so beautiful, smiling so easily, sharing, working hard.

The landscape lends a feeling of intimacy, smallness, and the same people are seen again and again. There is a feeling of something brewing under the skin, of repressed emotions, that could be triggered at any moment; a feeling that it wouldn't take too much for something big to happen, for tension to tighten and minimize the space even further – to suddenly feel trapped in this beautiful but unfortunate country. Only there in the town of Gisenyi, there is a volcanic lake, and it widens out the landscape, offers perspective, a wider vista.

Kids come to the lake to swim and jump off the pier and splash around. Some come to fish. Others come to ponder and reflect or just to be. Most Rwandans are in their fields right now, and are too busy trying to survive....

November 15, 1996, was for me an unforgettable Friday when the people in the camps started to pick up their belongings and make their way back to Rwanda. At the beginning, there were about 1000 people per minute crossing in. In a few days, more than 600,000 people had crossed the border. The exodus made its way through Gisenyi town and up into the hills, back to the interior communes. Those first few nights were incredible, people sleeping everywhere. The roadside fields were ravaged and mobs were anticipated wherever there was food stored. On that first day alone, nearly 1000 children were separated from their parents because of the sheer mass and volume of the crowd and movement. My regular two-minute drive to the house took an hour, and people slept all up the driveway to the gate. The blood rushed to my head as I anticipated my own bed, and felt the complete depths of the injustice of our world.

Many days I spent just at the border, as the organization I worked with was responsible for the most vulnerable repatriates and, most importantly, the children who had been separated from their parents. We scanned for them as they passed. Later, the numbers of repatriates trickled down; there was more time to talk to people who went by to find out which camp they were coming from and to hear a bit of their story. Most people kept up the slow rhythm of their walking. Some had come straight from the camps, either on foot or by truck. Others had emerged from the

forests where they were scavenging for food, and eating roots and tree bark while in hiding from the violence that was occurring. Many, maybe most, seemed distant, wore the deadened eyes of too much difficult life; sometimes they were disoriented. I was often asked, "Rwanda?" [Refugees: prodded onto trucks, train cars, helicopters without an idea of where they are going. What more can they do but follow whatever directives they are given, without question?] I met one woman with blood running down the

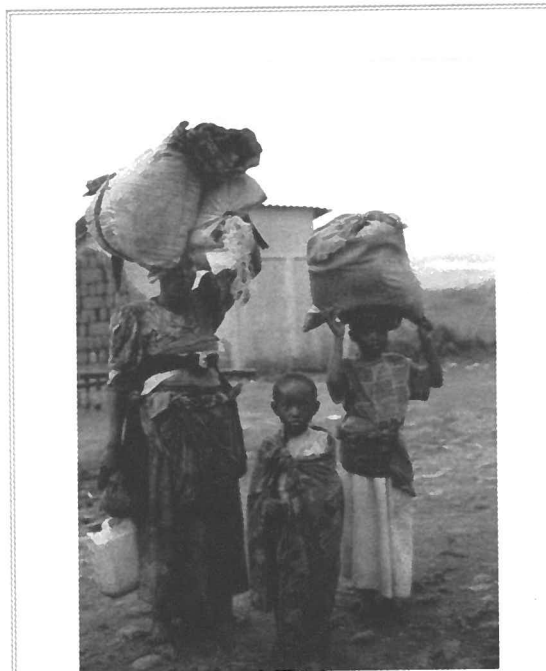
inside of her legs. She had just given birth in the back of a covered truck. I took her to the local hospital, where there was no power that night, and held a flashlight for a nurse as she removed the placenta. Everyone had their own story.

The politics in Rwanda, in the whole region, are complex beyond belief. There are layers of truth, layers of lies and propaganda; people react to real events, to invented and imagined events. There are so many groups and factions, it is far more than simply Hutus and Tutsis at each other's throats. And Hutus and Tutsis had shared communities; there was intermarriage, and friendship. But in November 1996, Rwandan repatriates were coming from camps within Zaire, where they'd been for more than two years. They had fled Rwanda because of the events that had unfolded in 1994. That was when the genocide happened. The United Nations had been

informed that genocide was being planned, who was in charge, what was going to happen. The reaction of the UN? To pull all remaining peacekeepers out of Rwanda; to stand by and watch.

Pure, absolute horror; up to a million people were killed. The bellies of pregnant women were slit open; children slaughtered like pigs; young people burned alive in the rings of old truck tires; bullets; dismembered bodies and lone heads; there were priests who informed on the parishioners they purported to shelter so the churches became the milieu for great massacres; mass graves all over the land, the most severe mental and physical trauma, paralysing fear, anger, revenge, unending distress.

There is no way to soften those truths. Every single



November 15, 1996, was for me an unforgettable Friday when the people in the camps started to pick up their belongings and make their way back to Rwanda.



can't mop up the blood; it is as if we were in a nightmare trying to accomplish a task, but we don't get anywhere. And there are the children of these atrocities, and we want to help, throw money at them, ease our own guilt, but they are locked in their pain, how can healing ever come about?...

However wrong the response of the UN, the killers themselves are still guilty of their own sins. They have the blood on their hands. I can't understand the actions of the murderers. Why did the murders have to be so gruesome? They failed to see the truth, that they were being so used by a greater evil. But I know we all carry the seed of evil inside us. We are all vulnerable to it, and capable, given the right soil.

person in the country was affected. The ripple effects of atrocities force their way into every pore of life, through generations, into the earth....

...Being in Rwanda was a real punch in the stomach for me, a real wake-up call. I woke up to some truths that seem so obvious to me now. Suddenly the faults of the media, of all the UN organizations became so evident. Distorted stories, disorganization on all levels, whatever the intentions (or lack of). I realized that in this world of ours, no one really knows what's going on. The authority I had empowered the UN with, the respect I had for the media was all illusory. There's no one to pass the buck on to. Any organization is just as great as the people within it, and who is without self-interest. If I probe deep into my motivations, they are rarely pure, I try but I'm full of self-interest, how can we expect others to be? And if we can't expect others to be without self-interest, how can this world ever achieve real justice and peace?

As far as the Canadian government is concerned, I feel that as part of the UN, the "global community," we should have intervened. It's as if we watched one brother kill the other; we knew it was going to happen, we were told the plan, we made martyrs out of those courageous few who risked their lives to speak out, but we walked away. Perhaps we refused to get involved for fear of being linked with the event, or even simply because what business is it of ours, why should we care? Africans killing Africans, it's all the same to us. And then in our guilt we bumble our way back in, try to mop up the blood, but we

And this Friday (November 15, 1996), the killers come home too, among the innocent, sheltered by them because they hide themselves among them. (Who am I seeing now, a victim or a perpetrator? They have the same face.) Most were poor, uneducated peasants who were susceptible to propaganda and egged on by people of power, who used fear as the great motivator. Kill or you will be killed. And later, as those guilty of genocide returned home to their communes, I saw some beg to be put into prison.

But the prisons are too full, they were told, you must go back to your former home. There, they will live again beside those families whose members they have killed. And the orphanages of Rwanda are full of the children of rape, a whole

All my beliefs went under a magnifying glass. I think I have now progressed to a microscope.

generation.

So what is our individual responsibility to the events of Rwanda, or other countries of the world? How are we to be held accountable? I have to think now of the line from Genesis, where God asks Cain where Abel is, and he replies, "Am I my brother's keeper?"

Personally, I find it more and more difficult to watch the news. I feel its heaviness; it turns my stomach and brings tears to my eyes. Give the burden to God? Is that enough? Information has become entertainment. Is it enough to be horrified? Isn't our responsibility, as among the most wealthy and educated of the world, to use the

knowledge and information we have to make better choices? To share the wealth? I came back from Rwanda just in time for the Winnipeg Flood of '97. Everything seemed out of proportion. Given, a problem is a problem. But the green lawns at the fronts of houses seemed a waste of land and time and no one seemed to spend time enjoying them anyway. And there was hysteria but nothing life-threatening. I needed a re-alignment of standards (or maybe not).

We enjoy "the good life." We take all that is good from the world around us: fruit, foods, oil, textiles, wood, labour, etc., from all around the world. We dump our waste in the poor part of the global town. The repercussions of this demand play themselves out on the global scale, on individuals and families around the world, prompting wars, violence and hardships and shortages on others. We are incredible wasters of resources. We defecate into water that's good enough to drink; we pollute the night sky with lights and throw off the birds' course. Our ecological footprints are massive. We don't know how to live in harmony with the earth and its other creatures and cultures. We can't learn the lessons from the environment around us because we forget that language.

In a sense, it's all a question of how to live, from day to day, isn't it? And a question of sharpening our imagination, trying to live in the shoes of another, if only for a few moments. Those Africans we see on the television screen, they don't seem real to us. "How can they carry such bundles on their head, and have so many children," we say. "I couldn't do that." We respect them in the same way we would respect a strange animal or a beast of burden. I have no doubt of our profound racism.

And how do they imagine us, those on the other side of the fence, those we view from our good life, from behind glass? I remember a moment in Gisenyi town; I was sitting outside, looking something over, and a little girl beside me started running her finger along my thumbnail. Then she was touching my finger. I pretended not to notice because I didn't want to embarrass her, make her shy. It was so funny and sweet. What does she imagine about me?

Maybe my best is simply to be the best person I can, to focus on my life's work: the "management" of my own soul, a dynamic relationship with the Divine. I want to live in harmony with nature, to implement my values locally. How can I blame politics for what I'm not in my personal life? That's a game I play with myself: making the macro, micro, making it personal. If I don't forgive, if I don't know how to live in peace with the world around me, how can I expect countries or governments to do the same?

At a human level, things are never simple. We can't reduce anything to several basic components. I feel my own complexities, that even in times of sadness, there is

room to stray off somewhere and feel happy. The photograph of the kids in the blue tent is a nice example of that. That morning or the evening before, they'd been crying for loneliness, scared because they'd lost their parents, and when a village mama came in and got the kids singing, a song they all knew, they brightened up for awhile, forgot their situation, danced and clapped and life was wonderful again. Never is a moment 100 percent sadness, anger, loneliness, joy, etc. One moment bumps up into the next, brings with it something new, the awakening of possibility. There is always hope, there is always a shadow lurking, there is unending potential, and the effects of our actions run in all directions, uncontrolled.

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Alison Doerksen has recently moved back to Winnipeg from extensive travels that have included periods of study and work. She continues to enjoy writing.

A Brother's Perspective

Continued from page 22

both miserable failures at employing the "silent treatment," we have become well-developed thrashers.

Thrashing is a fairly intense, partly-controlled form of collaboration with a competitive edge. Problems are attacked without delay, and with vigour. To the uninitiated observer, thrashing can be unsettling. Nevertheless, I have taken pride in the fact that we generally produce more light than heat. Our track record for eventually arriving at a place of mutual understanding and purpose is, by God's grace, nothing short of remarkable. By Adam's standards, peaceful relations.

But all is not right; I recognize too many elements of unpeacefulness in what I do and say. At home, my talent for sparking uneasiness, guilt, lack of confidence, resentment or bad temper comes far too easily. Trouble is, I sometimes find myself unwilling to practise the communication skills that I teach – active listening and effective speaking. What's up with that? Underlying all, I think, is an underdeveloped (unexercised?) spirit of generosity that gets in the way of building peaceful relations. Rats, there's more work to be done.

Our home church is currently working through a teaching series with the theme "Getting along with those around you." I think I need to take notes for the next few Sundays. Thanks a lot, Adam.

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In addition to his work as a mediator and facilitator in private practice, Rick Schmidt teaches conflict resolution (CR) studies at the University of Winnipeg, leads CR training workshops and does CR consulting work for a variety of organizations.

How would you paint peace?

by Rebecca Yoder Neufeld

I don't know if I like the story or not. It's about a king who commissioned the finest artists in the land to paint a picture of peace. To the surprise of those assembled on the day the king chose the painting he liked best, he rejected the serene lake scene that breathed tranquility. Instead he chose the most disturbing painting – dark with stormy skies, forbidding mountains and a crashing, vicious waterfall. On closer view, the crowd saw a small bush clinging to a rock, where a mother bird sat in perfect peace on her nest. And the king declared: "Peace does not mean a place where there is no danger, no confusion, no trouble. Peace means to be in the midst of all those things, and still be calm in your spirit."

I don't like the story if it's read this way: you can have inner peace with no awareness or concern for the hell that is breaking loose all around you. In this sense it is unfaithful to be "at peace" while God's justice does not yet extend as far as the waters cover the sea. God has again and again sent prophets to disturb us, to unsettle our false peace, our "peace" gained at the price of silence about the injustices in our own families, or gained at the price of distancing ourselves from the suffering that surrounds us; the "peace" of hurried, false forgiveness, the "peace" of my security and comfort while others are in anguish.

"Nesting" is a powerful urge in our North American society these days, seen in a hunger for books and products and time focussed on cooking, redecorating and home entertainment refuges. We want to create order and beauty at home in a world whose chaos and violence overwhelms us. We want to shut out bad news and needy people and appeals for help – all assaults on our peacefulness. In the images of Tolkien's stories now so popular in film, we want to keep enjoying the tranquility and comfort of the shire rather than be uncomfortably recruited into a campaign to defeat evil.

Sitting in "the nest" in this sense is unfaithful to the

Peacemaker who entered human life in all its pain and messiness, and again and again spoke and acted in ways that assured rejection and finally death. As his followers we are called not to "feel peaceful," but to make peace at every level in ways that engage our wills and minds and bodies: holding the tongue, speaking out, taking steps out of entrenched hostilities in our families and churches, placing our bodies and our words in public places where our presence is a "no" to war and injustice and a call to true peace.

But...I also like the story, and the painting of the unflustered bird. The mother who creates an oasis of security and warmth around her. The bird whose drive to nurture is not shaken by all the forces around her who would crush life in its fragility.

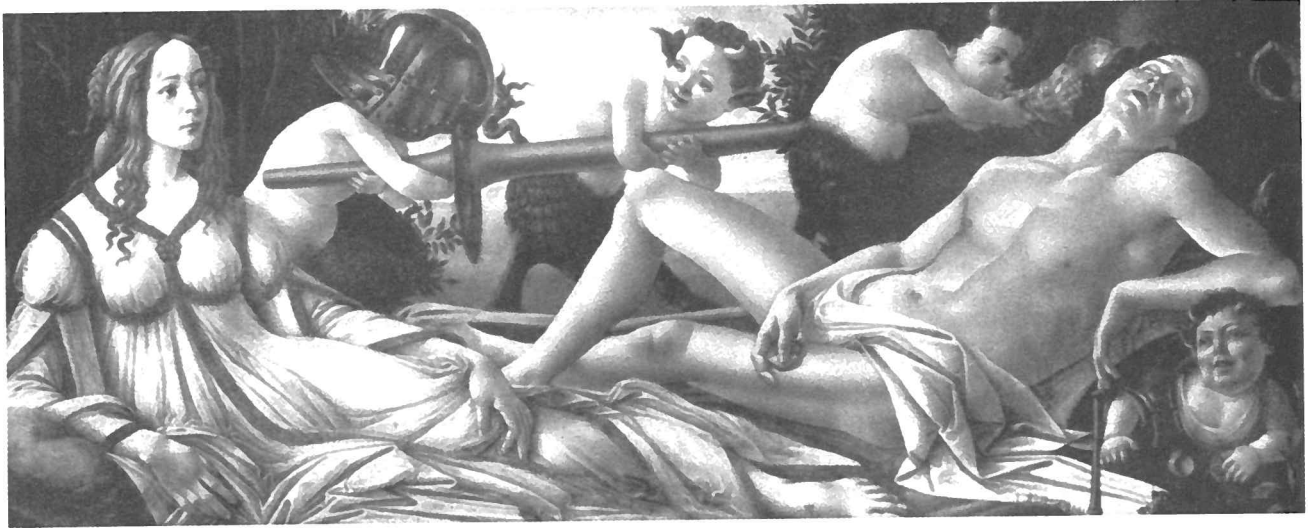
Gandhi, a peace pioneer who would hardly be accused of sitting on his nest, reminded us that "you must be the change you wish to see in the world." Our personal lives and spirits are to reflect the peace that God wills for us all. God calls us to "be in the midst of all those things," and still be infused with the assurance and the peace given "not as the world gives" – a peace that is rooted in the faith that God is in control and that the Comforter is with us come what may. This is a truth of which worship and Scripture remind us even as the noisy waterfalls and storms try to drown it out. It is a confidence perhaps easy to mouth for those of us far removed from hunger and atrocities, and yet often held most strongly by the very persons whose tragic circumstances could lead them to doubt it. For many years I have been privileged to know the faith

of people who have come through the civil wars of Central America, unshaken in the conviction of a God passionately in solidarity with the vulnerable, when they could be asking why God abandoned so many of them. In the last year I have been honoured to correspond with James Ballenger, husband of a woman killed by the snipers who terrorized the Washington, D.C., area and other cities. As the calls

for the death penalty became ever more strident, he remained steadfast and often lonely in his conviction of God's love for him, for his murdered wife and also for the killers. God's love for them would not allow him to want their destruction but rather made him desire their wholeness and their coming to peace with God.

And so I can like the story and see its limitations at the same time, since peace is both a gift and a response. It is a gift of assurance and a response of participation in

We want to create order and beauty at home in a world whose chaos and violence overwhelms us.



"Venus and Mars" by S. Botticelli. In the classic tradition, Venus, the image of love is shown winning over Mars, who represents war.

God's great plan to work reconciling peace for the whole world, indeed, for all of creation. Arthur Boers tells another bird story in his book *The Rhythm of God's Grace*. With awe he recalls a time when his daughter led the family to a nature reserve, hoping that they would experience what she had on a class field trip: feeding wild chickadees on her palm. "We found places among the trees, assumed the posture Erin recommended, and acted like statues with palms upturned." Their waiting and efforts in the snow were rewarded: "after we had all been visited many times by the small birds, we reluctantly give in to the cold and trudged away. We all agreed the words 'magical' and even 'miraculous' were not overstated." And yet "it was fully possible that we could have stood in that grove for hours rather than twenty minutes and not had one chickadee approach."

To nourish a real peace in our lives and our world, we need to act in ways that open us to the gift and the Giver of Peace. Our availability in prayer, in communion with God, does that. The "praying" for peace we do with our actions – public witness, letters, initiatives for justice in our communities, care for the "unpeace" of the mentally or physically ill, sharing of the "good news" – are all ways we open ourselves to join in with God's far-reaching peace-making. And then we wait in hope for God's miracle, as we nurture and protect the life given into our care.

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Rebecca Yoder Neufeld divides her time between homemaking and a variety of volunteer tasks. Her past commitments have included pastoring, teaching in theological education programs in Central America and settlement/advocacy work with refugees.

To husbands and wives

by Diane Tucker

Find time to make love
 in the day's middle.
 The light is better.
 Winter light through fog.
 White light liquid and diffuse across your bodies.

Keep the curtains open. Yes,
 the neighbours may get a glimpse.
 Won't you "honour the marriage bed to keep it holy"
 with a refracted second of your joy?

Cast off the dim years of doing it in the dark.
 Let the watered light spread across your backs,
 your bellies.
 In the history of all the world there has never
 been a belly like that one. There never will be again.

Don't wait until night falls.
 Now is the time. Kiss it.

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*Diane Tucker lives in Vancouver with her husband and two children. Her first book of poetry, *God on His Haunches*, was published in 1996. She continues to write, sings in her church's choir, serves on the executive of the Burnaby Writer's Society and walks Doxa, the family dog.*

"Put Yourself into My Position": a letter by Susan B. Peters

by Dora Dueck

Anyone who goes off to do peacemaking – whether as a missionary or a service worker – may soon discover that one of her challenges will be the relationship with "Head Office." One letter after another may have to be written: asking, explaining, reporting, complaining. She wants those who pay the bills and to whom she is responsible to understand what she is doing and to respond to her needs.

I came across a fine example of this genre of letters recently when I was combing through the archival records of Susan B. Peters (1899 - 1992) at the Centre for M.B. Studies.

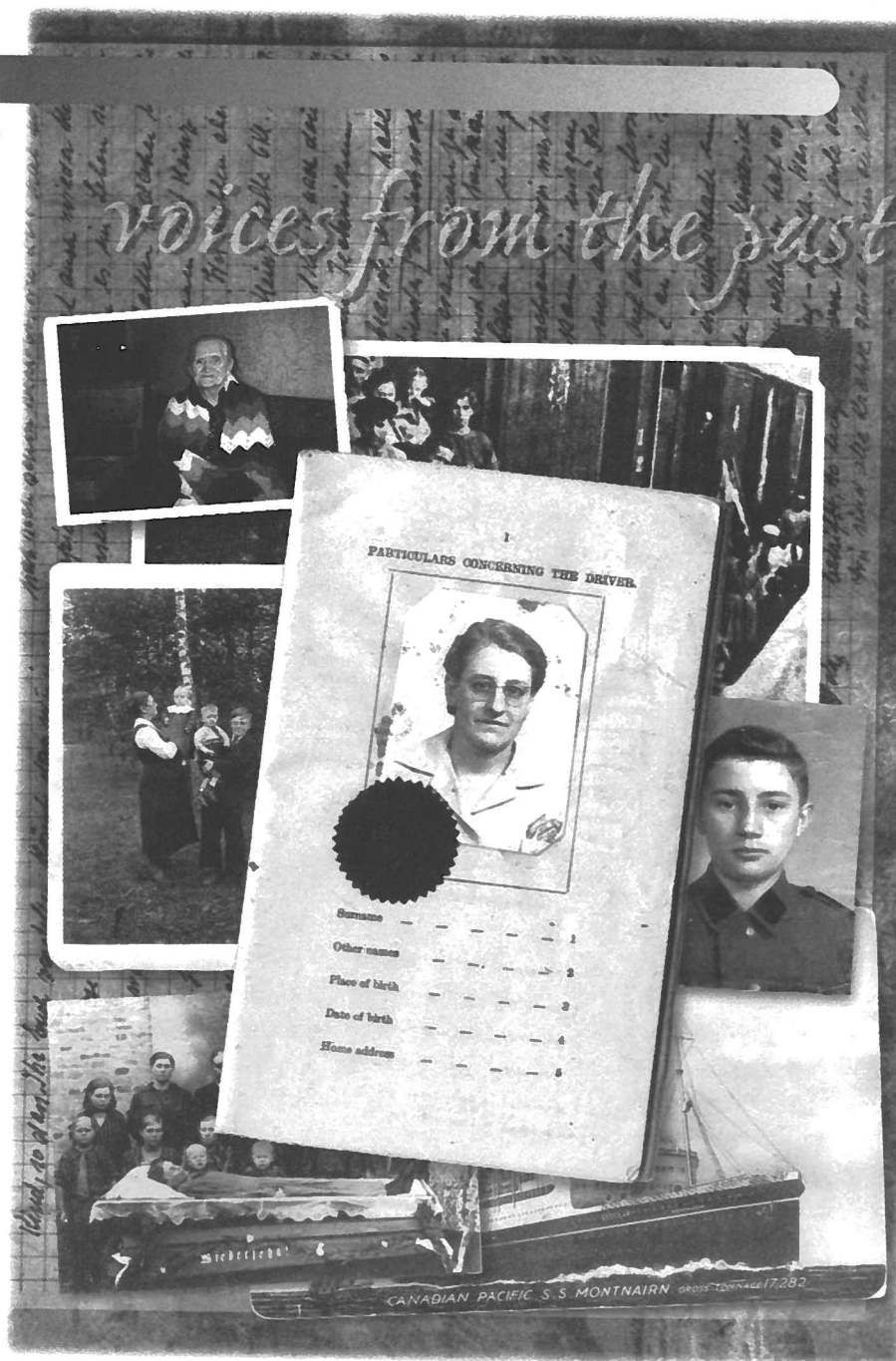
Susan, or Susie as she was usually called, served with Mennonite Central Committee in Europe, 1945 - 48. She worked in a boys' home in England, did food distribution in Amsterdam, and directed MCC efforts with refugees in Denmark for two years.

In the 1960s Susie served another term with MCC, this time with refugees in Jordan and other Middle East countries. She also had a long career of teaching (Her papers relating to the years she taught Inuit children in the North West Territories are in Alberta's Glenbow Museum archives.)

Susan Peters was adventurous, articulate, and generous. She enjoyed her independence. (My mother, who knew her, recalls Susie saying the only time she needed a man was when she had to put up a stovepipe!) She had a deep faith in God.

The letter that follows was written in 1948 to Atlee Beechy, the European director of the MCC Relief and Refugee program in Basel, Switzerland, in reply to his letter to her. That letter, it seems, answered her inquiry about the plans to move Mennonites waiting in Danish refugee camps. These plans, she learned, had been changed but she had not been told.

"Put yourself into my position," she states, carefully out-



lining what that position felt like from the inside. "It is only fair to keep me informed," she says.

Although she speaks very directly, we sense the working relationship between the correspondents is secure. In this letter there is both strength and commitment to the practical implications of peace.

Dear Brother Beechy:

Thank you for your letter of May 4th, 1948.

I am quite aware that it is impossible to write personal letters to all the MCC workers in the field, although they are a great help in keeping up one's courage. Still that is not my biggest concern: I am used to being alone and working away from my own people and my own kind. My

worry are my people here in the camps. With the Lord's help I am trying to keep up their spirit and their faith that the MCC is still behind them. Although the strain has been great, so that a number have given up and had their names taken off the list, the majority still kept up their courage.

Now put yourself into my position: I am told that a movement of small groups will begin on the 8th of May. I am told to inform the people and also the Danish refugee organization. I even urged them to be sure to be ready. Everybody is excited – at last! They were all to be moved into one camp. Then nothing more. The date of departure comes nearer and nearer. Everybody asks this and that. All I can say: I have not been informed that we shall *not* move the people, therefore, I think everything is in order. Finally I, too, have my suspicions that something went wrong again and inquire, to be told that the plan has been abandoned.

I know that there are greater groups to be moved and that the work in connection with those movements is tremendous. I also know, that our people here in Denmark are comparatively safe, etc., etc., nevertheless I believe it is only fair to keep me informed if plans, concerning our group, have been changed. You mention that this whole matter of continuing the program in Denmark is unclear at present. Has there ever been a time when it was clear? Ever since I came here, when Elma was still in Denmark, we were told: it will be a matter of a few months only. I know that no one can be made responsible for this uncertainty, but I know that work under those circumstances puts a terrific strain on a person. Elma and I began registering these people as far back as February 1947 without even a hint from anybody how to go about [it]. We visited a few camps, then Elma left. I tried to carry on with the help of the Mennonite leaders. Mr. J.G. Toews helped when he was here in July. But all the time, I never received any instruction as to what people were eligible for immigration to Paraguay, how they were to be screened and other regulations, which are well known to the D.P. [displaced persons] workers in Germany. They get the information, they are together and can talk things over. Only when the need seems to be very pressing someone comes here on a hurried visit, when there is no time to talk things over. When I make a special trip to Germany to discuss matters or to get information, no one there seems to have any time for the Denmark problem. Then I do feel discouraged. But I do not mean to complain. This is just telling you how things go in general. I feel that if I were informed regularly of developments and also received all the information necessary in processing these people, it would not be necessary

Ever since I came here, when Elma was still in Denmark, we were told: it will be a matter of a few months only.

for a lot of expense in sending [someone] here. A circular letter to the camps from the director or MCC executive reminding the people that they are not forgotten, would mean so much to them. Perhaps I am to blame that I do not keep the problem before the eyes of our people at home by writing more about the work of the MCC in Denmark. The more aggressive people get a bigger response.

But in spite of all this that I have written, I still have a vision. I still want to hold out until these our brethren can be brought into a new home country and can be helped to get a new home. I just cannot quit before the task is finished. May the Lord grant strength, courage and a clearer vision.

Now to come to some business. In my letter in March I mentioned that my supply of travel cheques was getting low. Since then I had to cash more to get parts for the car and have it repaired. Last week again the car had to be taken into the repair shop. This time they want dollars to buy certain parts. I am down to \$30.00. [Further information and requests re. money, and a proposed visit of Brother ____]

I am processing two persons at present for Canada. A few more will come in to Copenhagen shortly to undergo the same process. Fifteen persons so far have been able to go to Canada and one to the USA. It does not seem a large number, but sixteen Mennonites have been helped to new

homes by the MCC and that means sixteen fewer homeless persons. They all are very happy to be over there. Every time I take a group on board ship, I feel thankful to the Lord for making it possible, at the same time I feel very homesick and wish I could go along for a spell.

Spring came early to Denmark. The big pear tree in our yard is in full bloom as also are the fruit trees in the country. I think I shall stop this tale of woe and go out for a walk.

Greetings to Mrs. Beechy and little Karin. I still see her setting the table with such a serious expression in her face and saying: "I help my Mummy."

Very sincerely,

Susie Peters

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Dora Dueck is a regular columnist for Sophia. If you wish to contact her about this or others of her columns, she may be reached by e-mail at hddueck@mts.net

The Ethics of Naming Toward God

by Helga Doerner

And God spoke all these words saying . . . "You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image, or any likeness of anything that is in heaven above, or that is in the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth; you shall not bow down to them or serve them . . ."
Exodus 20:1, 3-5, RSV

The church is guilty of breaching one of the foremost commandments contained in the Hebrew Scriptures. Over the centuries, it has created and perpetuated an idolatrous image of God. Commanded not to make a graven image nor to serve it, the church worships a male god. Not to name this as an ethical issue, with far reaching consequences, is to continue to allow a false image to fragment our world. The history of the evolution of predominantly masculine metaphors for God is long and complex, reaching beyond the text into a world that will remain unknown to us. Yet, today the dominant male metaphors continue to devastate lives and need to be addressed.

I speak out of my own experience in addressing this issue. Yet, I know that my story is not a singular one. My story began with a most innocent question posed as a theological reflection: "How can I as a woman, be made in the image of a male God?" I pulled book after book off the library shelves in search of an answer, but no answer was forthcoming. The question remained an unconscious quest, until a year and a half later, when it surfaced during my studies of the formation of Christian Scriptures. Intrigued by a reference to a suppressed Sophia Christology, I followed this fine thread back into the Hebrew Scriptures and discovered female metaphors for God. A new question arose: "Why are these alternative images of God never mentioned in the church?" It is a question that needs to be addressed, as it has ethical implications that will not go away.

Rebecca S. Chopp states: "Language is . . . the site where our subjectivity is formed; we think and feel, we experience the world according to the categories given to us by language" (*The Power to Speak: Feminism, Language, God*, New York: Crossroad, 1989, p 12).

When we are taught to address God in exclusively

male metaphors, the male character becomes the ideal image/idol of God. The male identity becomes the primary symbol within our religious understanding and the language of the male God symbol becomes foundational to how we experience ourselves and our world. Though the implications have a global impact, I will confine this writing to experiences closer to home.

The first time I heard someone refer to God as "she," I could feel my whole body reverberating with the shock. There was a distressing tug on the root of my theological beliefs. As I listened more closely to women "naming toward God" out of their experiences, the shock became a resonating dissonance. "Naming toward God" is a term descriptive of a truth that God cannot be contained in a name (see Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*, Boston: Beacon Press, 1973, p 37). I felt betrayed by a church that had limited the names of God to one gender – and it wasn't mine. Elizabeth A. Johnson encapsulates my experience with her words: "Personal development of the self also constitutes development

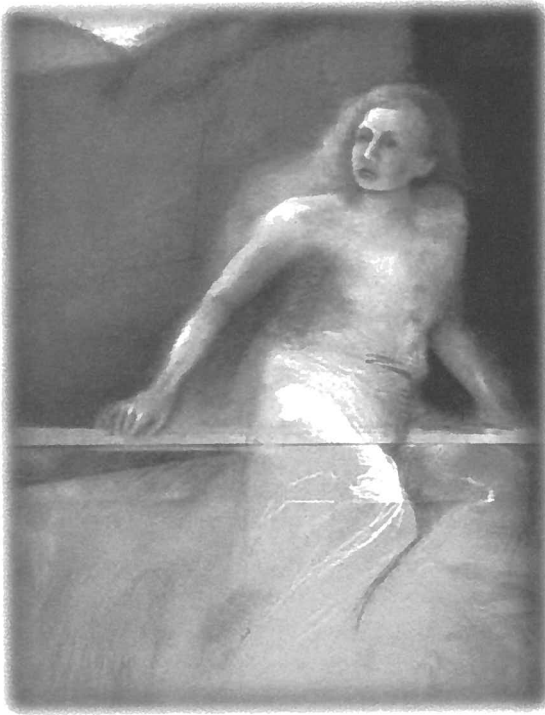
of the experience of God; loss of self-identity is also a loss of the experience of God (*She Who Is: The Mystery of God in Feminist Theological Discourse*, New York: The Crossroad Publishing Company, 1992, p 65).

More accurately, when God is not known in the context of female metaphors, women are handicapped in developing a healthy self-image. As a

woman, being made in the image of a male God becomes a perpetual ambiguity of identity. In my own transformative journey, I have found it necessary to relinquish the language of the church fathers and to enter into scriptural studies with the voices of women as my guides. I needed to enter into dialogue with scriptures based on my own female experience. It is through this intensive encounter that I have found a living theology, God/dess' and myself.

Not long ago, I was serving a congregation of people well past their prime. It was there I witnessed the hunger of other women desiring to know God within their own experiences. With a sense of risk, I stood before them and retold the story of Nicodemus's conversation with Christ. I imagined it was a story that every one was more than familiar with in a traditional kind of telling. Yet on this day, I retold the story emphasizing the experience of

When we are taught to address God in exclusively male metaphors, the male character becomes the ideal image/idol of God.



birth – being born of God – and paralleled it to being born of woman. The response was unexpected. As the women filed by me after the service, many of them took my hand, looked into my eyes with a look of wonder in their own, and expressed their thanks. It was as if they too had finally caught an awesome glimpse of themselves in the image of God, who gives birth.

This is only one of the many images that can connect the personal development of women to the development of a meaningful experience of God. There are many others. As a church that quotes Hebrew Scriptures as the Word of God, surely the words of Exodus 20:1, 3-5, need to be taken seriously: “You shall have no other gods before me. You shall not make for yourself a graven image . . . ; you shall not bow down to them or serve them. . . .” You shall not limit women’s experience of God or of defining themselves by perpetuating predominantly masculine metaphors for God. Metaphors for God reflecting women’s experiences are present in the biblical stories. It is time they found voice in an ethically responsible church.

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Helga Doermer has recently opened “Beyond Words,” a counselling service in Winnipeg. She and her husband have two sons.

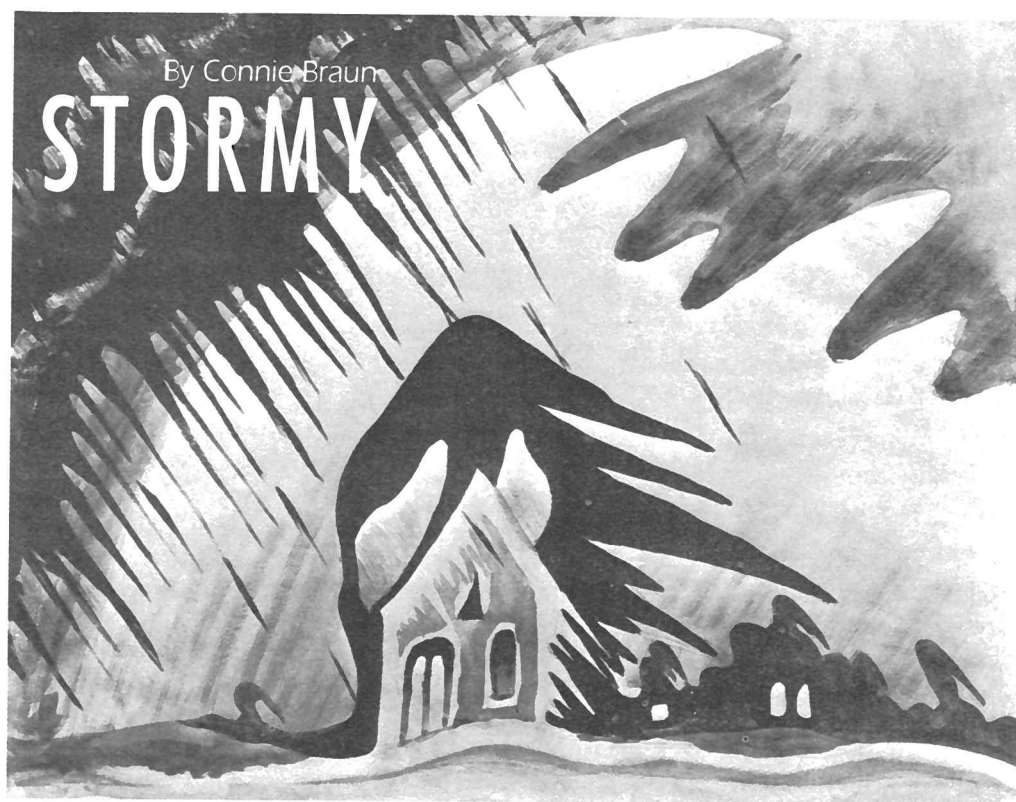
¹ The use of the word “Goddess” in Christian theology is shocking and points up how we are traditionally specific in our use of feminine modifiers, but less so in masculine ones. The use of God/dess here is meant to encompass the fullness of God’s nature as male or female – indeed as both neither and more than these human assignments of character.

The Holy She Ghost

goes out ahead
 unlost on earth
 gathering voices like wild blackberries
 dusting the dreams of the sleeping.
 No one knows her fully.
 Like the faces of infants, she was sent
 to make smile the old, the broken, the disillusioned,
 for the normal to believe the crazy.
 She creeps quietly from room to thought
 in the empty hallowed places of conversation
 in country stores, Mom and Pop cafes, crowded city
 streets.
 Sometimes she swoops loud and crashes thunder
 ready to save us from mediocrity
 from hatred and revenge
 the pricklings of war
 governments that would have us believe
 in the simplicity of good and evil
 us and them.

Her hand is in this room
 can't you feel it
 there beneath the everyday
 there like water springing from the rock.
 From the Yukon's night
 you can feel her veils of colour
 streaming through a bright sky
 thrilling you, expecting miracles
 small and wondrous.

Cheryl Denise



By Connie Braum

STORMY

CHARLES BURCHFIELD THE EAST WIND

I can still feel her
slight body heaving
against me as sobs
escaped her breath
by breath.

These years later, I remember the spring tempest occurring outside that day, May 19th, 1984. The whistling wind and rain pushed through the open wooden panes, and the long gauzy yellow curtains swirled like streamers with each gust. We were so young. We didn't know what to expect. The contractions began as a dull ache, but their manageable discomfort was just a ruse, for soon I was overtaken by their intensity; like ocean waves they rolled, crested, *crashed* and dissipated. The open hospital window in the birthing room was my only connection to the world outside.

I inhaled with heightened awareness. How wonderful the air, charged with freshness, felt, even tasted. After a relatively short while, our child arrived, boisterous and impatient to begin her new life, post natal, unfettered. She drew breath, and as her lungs expanded for the first time she squalled along with the wind outside. With reference to the weather, the attending nurse teasingly suggested we name her Stormy. Perhaps the memory is still vivid because this was our first birth experience, more likely though, because that morning so aptly characterizes our precious only daughter.

I was mesmerized by the powder-scented newborn days, yet aware of their fleeting nature. Though it seemed innocent, and came only in small acceptable increments, I sensed the presence of independence from the first pangs of labour. I recognized it as she turned away from the breast, satisfied from nursing. I knew that crawling, and later walking, embodied motion away from me. She was

forever racing ahead or clambering out of the car seat that was meant for safety. I still hear her say with two-year-old resolution, "You go now Mommy," after I had taken her to a caregiver so that I could resume my studies part-time. I smiled, pleased that she felt confident, yet I felt wistful. Would I have felt better if she had said, "No, Mommy, don't go!"? That would be selfish of me, and that would not be like her.

It wasn't long afterward that she began school. She wore a powder blue button-down blouse and a navy jumper with shiny black shoes. Navy socks were required to complete the ensemble. Despite reprimands from the uniform monitor over the neon green or pink socks slouching around her ankles, she impatiently pointed out what should have been so obvious: "But we all look the same!" One day, she came across some old 'sixties costume jewelry; her eyes grew wide with pleasure as if she had found the gems from a buried treasure. She had discovered something more valuable – the adornments of individuality that would set her apart from the other little girls, even if she had to wear those navy blue socks anyway. So off she went, ornamented with bobbles and beads, psychedelic clip on earrings and a flower-power broach. There was nothing in the school handbook about *jewelry*.

Scholastic activities ushered in a significant measure of autonomy. Her thoughts would not be extensions of my own. As she began to develop observations about the way the world seemed to her, I experienced paradoxical emotions; my child was gaining knowledge at the price of

innocence. The push and pull of letting go (but just a little at a time) was eased somewhat by her openness to share her thoughts with me still. However there came a day when I knew I did not have an adequate answer for her question. I don't remember the season, or the weather, though I recall shades of gray. Or is it the heaviness, the atmosphere of my heart that I recollect? I can still feel her slight body heaving against me as sobs escaped her breath by breath. She was only ten or so, and the weight of her emotions was too great for her. She had tried to comprehend the nature of God and couldn't. Despite familiar memory verses and Bible stories her faith was in crisis as she cried to me, "How do I know God is real?" I held her tightly through this inner storm, her cheeks and my shoulder drenched with tears. Doubt swamped her like the waves that rocked the Galilean fishing boat and caused the disciples to cry out. Cradling her, I quietly cried out too – so conscious of my limitations.

The years tumble forward and toss us about like fallen leaves in the changing winds. She is taller than me; her frame is graced by liveness and strength. She strikes a pose, a ballerina with an attitude. Our personalities are not similar, though people say to her, "I see your mother in you," which of course frustrates her sometimes. We disagree about the appropriateness of choices (hers). We differ in our views about reasonable boundaries, and yes, even over the realness of God.

God is so distant to her and my availability is declined. Is this independence? "Don't take it personally," my husband says trying to comfort me. "Why is it like this?" I want to know. I stand braced against the winds of adolescence rather than bend, and the pressure builds like two air masses about to converge – a thunderstorm is forming. The atmosphere becomes saturated until finally, the rain comes down. Yet, in the natural world, isn't rain required for growth? Through every season, the trees unfailingly hold out their boughs to catch the drops like outstretched hands in praise despite the elements – faithful despite inclement circumstances. And so, in the downpour, my husband's advice begins to test my expectations of motherhood and faith. "Train a child in the way [she] should go, and when [she] is old [she] will not turn from it" (Proverbs 22:6 NIV). Have I focused on the second part, without understanding the first? What does it mean, "in the way she should go?" I discover this interpretation: According to her *way* – according to her *personality*. By God's design my roots strain deeper to a sacred maternal reservoir where love is unconditional. I know I must learn to bend as I see how naturally the mature Maples, firmly fixed, respond.

Tonight I pick her up from Drama rehearsal; she is beautiful with youth and promise. It is raining heavily and

she says she is a little tired after such a long day at school. She settles into the passenger seat and drops her shoulders, reposed. Dense drops beat down on us as we ride along to the rhythm of the windshield wipers swinging like metronomes. Otherwise it is silent between us in the car. We drive along quietly like this for a while until out of the corner of my eye, to the right, I see a faint blue flash in the black nocturnal sky. I am the only one who sees it, and then, almost instantly a question emerges, though I don't understand the relevancy of it. Am I just trying to make conversation?

"Do you like storms?" I ask her.

"What?"

"Do you like storms?"

"Why do you ask that?" she wants to know.

"I don't know, but do you?" I try again.

Then, "I love them!" she exclaims, and stops short as if she has forgotten herself for a moment, or who she's with.

"Tell me why you love them," I probe gently, sensing that this exchange will lead us somewhere significant. There is a pause, and then in a clear voice she offers me this in rapid speech: "I love them because I know that inside it's warm and I can just curl up and be cozy no matter how much the wind is blowing, or how cold, or wet it is outside."

That's all. She has no more to say, though it is enough for me. As we drive homeward I think about her words, our relationship, her nature, and I understand; there lies a deeper meaning, though I believe she is not cognizant of it. Even in my limitedness, it is my boundaries, my steady love, however imperfect it is, my more certain, weathered faith in God, that make a safe place for her in the full-blown gales of growing up. But, perhaps she is cognizant of this truth. She often reminds me that she can think for herself; that she is growing up. Yes, she can; she is.

There is another truth that I discover tonight: My daughter, like that first spring tempest rushing in through the open window, willfully draws me out into an unfamiliar world and makes me aware of it. The rain drums against the glistening window, massaging us with its gentle vibrations as we silently continue on our way home, side-by-side.

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Connie Braun lives with her husband and three active teenagers in Abbotsford, BC, where they attend Bakerview MB Church.

Peaceful Relations?

by Rick Schmidt

"If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone." Fine-sounding words, from the apostle Paul, in a letter to his Christian friends in Rome (12:18 NIV). I can only agree – I, who work in the field of conflict resolution as an instructor, workshop leader, mediator and group facilitator. I preach and teach the stuff, and act as a guide to people in conflict who are looking for a path out of the swamp. By now, you'd think I'd have a pretty firm grip on the peace thing, personally. Jeepers, I wish. Oh sure, I can put up a good front when it suits me or everything's going my way. But too many people have experienced a thornier reality; the mediator doesn't always get it right, either.

What is peace? The war in Iraq reminds us of the easy answer: peace is what happens when the shooting stops. While a good start, that's hardly a satisfying definition for me, nor, I suspect, for a resident of Baghdad. Our big, fat Webster's offers some synonyms: quiet, security, order, serenity, harmony, calm, mutual accord, agreement. These are helpful, in a dry, detached sort of way.

Some years ago, a wise old man named Adam Curle put a new spin on the matter for me. Adam had

many decades of experience as a mediator. Rather than talk about peace, he found it more useful to talk about peaceful or unpeaceful relations – because regardless of the context, peace (or the lack of it) will always be found between individuals or groups – in the nature and essence of their relationships.

A peaceful relationship, said Adam, is one that, on the whole, does

never stay the same; for better or worse, they are always growing, evolving, shrinking or dying. Peaceful relations, then, are never only a particular goal or destination to arrive at, or a single appointment to either miss or be on time for. They are an unfolding process, a progression of decisions; they are the direction we travel in and the way we choose to travel.

What I like about Adam's perspective is that a peaceful relationship doesn't have to be air-brushed perfect. Some days it may look and feel more awkward than pretty. Adam and I have both learned that disagreement and conflict are normal parts of a peaceful relationship. Mistakes are expected; people can fall down and get up. The potential for peaceful relationships is within anyone's grasp.

The trouble with Adam's thinking is that it provides a measuring stick for peace that is simple and effective, and too darn easy to use. This little writing assignment has caused me to take the measure of

my own relationships, and I am feeling uncomfortable. Take my relationship with Sara Jane, my wife of nearly twenty-six years – plenty long enough for us to develop our own unique approach to conflict. Neither of us is remotely shy or reserved; nor does either of us suffer from an unhealthy, pathological need to be over-accommodating. And having long ago acknowledged that we are

Continued on page 13 ➤



Relationships are living, dynamic things that never stay the same; for better or worse, they are always growing, evolving, shrinking or dying.

the participants more good than harm. In a peaceful relationship one would find mutual support and comfort, and help in becoming more wise and compassionate. Conversely, in an unpeaceful relationship, one or both of the players will make the other uneasy, guilt-ridden, lacking in confidence, resentful or bad-tempered.

This sheds a provocative light on the concept of peace. Relationships are living, dynamic things that

I'd Rather Teach Peace

by Coleman McCarthy
(Maryknoll, NY, Orbis Books, 2002).

Reviewed by Alicia Karen Elkins

I'd Rather Teach Peace is the fascinating story of how a columnist for *The Washington Post*, Coleman McCarthy, began teaching peace and founded the Center for Peace Teaching, a nonprofit organization that helps schools begin programs in peace studies. McCarthy has written the book in a memoir/journal style based on one semester at six different schools. The schools were: Georgetown Law, School Without Walls, University of Maryland, The Washington Center, Oak Hill Youth Center, and Stone Ridge Sacred Heart School for Girls.

McCarthy combines several techniques: the narrative style, question and answer, quotations from a wide variety of sources, exact copies of his handouts and tests and excerpts of the students' works. The book is organized chronologically and sectioned by months. Once you start reading it, you cannot put it down until you have reached the last page. It keeps you fully engaged.

The inclusion of the quotes and the teaching materials makes this an excellent introduction to peace studies. For example, there is a list of 22 countries in which the United States has been militarily active since World War II. He asks how many of these resulted in a democratic government. The answer is none. He follows this with an explanation that the countries attacked were primarily poor people and most were people of colour. He then tosses in the statistics for military spending for fiscal year 2001, which are broken down to the sum of \$8,000 per second.

It is these hard-hitting, shocking facts that will jolt the reader into anger and action. As you read the words of

the students, you will feel compelled to change the world for the future generations. The best part is that McCarthy shows you what to do to demilitarize our world, to take the glamour and heroism out of the war coverage in history textbooks and to increase the classroom emphasis on the peace promoters throughout history.

My older brother is a pacifist, while I am a former sergeant of the 101st Airborne Division. He talks peace while I talk war. I never imagined that I would become a pacifist and actively promote world peace. But after reading this book, I found I could no longer support our militarist way of life. I am proof that this manuscript will change your mindset! If McCarthy can overcome my military brainwashing, he can reach anyone. I wish every parent and every person connected to the educational system, especially teachers, would read this book. It has the potential to change the world! It is the most powerful book that I have read in years.

Alicia Karen Elkins is the 2003 Ford Conservation Fellow. She is working to complete her MA in Creative Writing.

SHALOM SEEKERS: *Living the call to do justice.*

Reviewed by Donna Stewart

This is a facilitator's manual designed to help congregations and other groups take steps toward justice through a series of workshops and hands-on resources, grounded in real life issues. The kit was created by The Public Justice Resource Centre (Citizens for Public Justice) in collaboration with the Office of Social Justice and Hunger Action of the Christian Reformed Church. And so the issues addressed reflect current priorities of the social

justice office: housing and homelessness, HIV and AIDS (particularly in Africa), and refugee issues.

I purchased a copy and I recommend it to churches or faith-based social justice agencies partly because of the people who put it together: Greg deGroot-Maggetti, Sandra Elgersma, Harry Kits, Bruce Voogd, Louise Slobodian, Murray MacAdam, and many more people who have been working for years on faith-based social justice issues. Also:

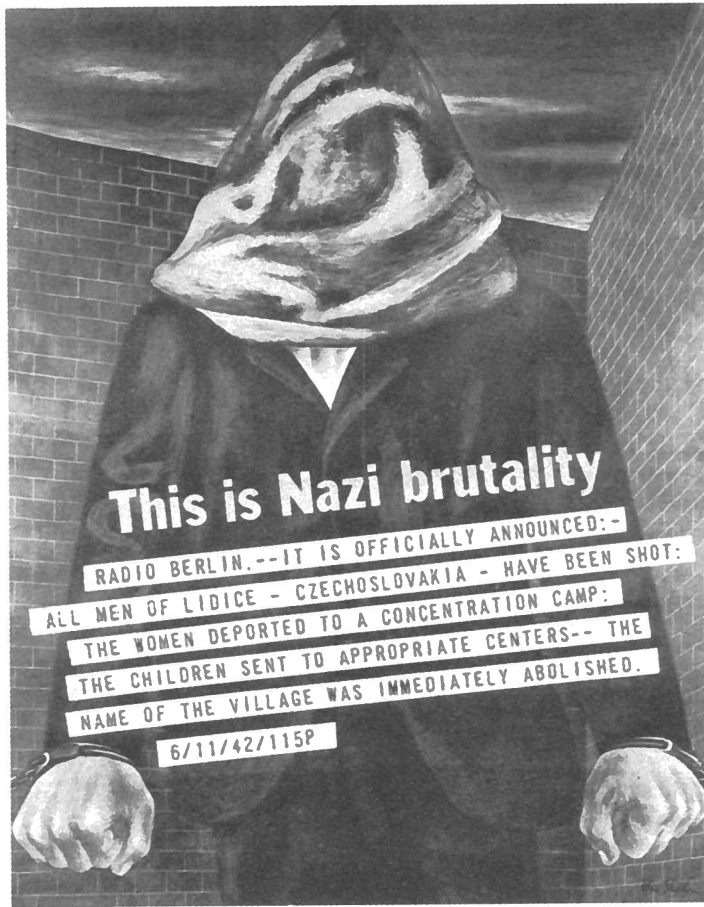
- There is a simple methodology for choosing the topic (housing & homelessness, HIV&AIDS, refugee issues) best for your group at this time
- There is a biblical basis for the series
- The series is designed with some flexibility, to allow for guest input in a couple of places, or for use at a weekend retreat rather than a series of workshops
- Each unit is designed with some flexibility, to be used in time slots of 45 minutes or up to 60 minutes if you have that much time.

The "Where to Go from Here" section is focused mainly on Christian Reform organizations, but the Public Justice Resource Centre is willing to work with other denominations/groups to adapt the manual for their use. Any facilitator could develop a "Where to Go from Here" section for her/his context.

I would buy this manual just for Joan Johanson's article on the difference between charity and justice and because I agree with the introductory claim that "...this kit is more than a study series." "It is a tool that will engage. . .you and your group in the work of justice."

The facilitator's binder can be purchased for \$25 through Faith Alive Christian Resources, 1-800-333-8300.

Donna Stewart is the Moderator of Killarney Park MB Church in Vancouver.



BEN SHAHN 1943, U.S.A



LUCIAN BERNHARD, "THAT IS THE WAY TO PEACE - THE ENEMIES WANT THAT. SO BUY WAR BONDS" 1914-1918, GERMANY



JEAN CARLU, 1941, FRANCE

The way of peace they do not know,
and there is no justice in their paths.
Their roads they have made crooked;
no one who walks in them knows peace.

ISAIAH 59:8 NRSV