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FEATURE INTERVIEW

Caring for the least of these

Four Mennonite responses to the controversial Responsibility to Protect doctrine in the light of Jesus' teachings

BY ROSS W. MUIR
Managing Editor

At a meeting of the UN General Assembly in 2005, heads of state and government agreed that, in the matter of the “responsibility to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity . . . [e]ach individual state has the responsibility to protect its populations” from such atrocities.

In the event that such states fail in their “responsibility to protect” their citizens, it was further agreed that “the international community, through the United Nations, also has the responsibility to use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other peaceful means, in accordance with [the UN Charter] to help protect” these vulnerable populations.

However, “should peaceful means be inadequate and national authorities manifestly fail to protect their populations,” the international leaders declared that they are “prepared to take collective action,” including armed intervention, to provide the necessary protection.

The decision was ratified by the UN Security Council in early 2006.

With the help of members of the Historic Peace Churches, the World Council of Churches (WCC) has been grappling with the concept of various forms of human intervention, including the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) doctrine, for many years. The WCC released its own position statement on R2P in 2006. (*See sidebar on page 5*).

In an effort to help our readers understand and respond to this relatively new and controversial concept, *Canadian Mennonite* asked two North American peace activists and a scholar, and an African member of the Mennonite World Conference (MWC) executive for their perspectives on R2P:

Any pacifist Christian who has not struggled deeply with the force of the argument that love of neighbour implies a responsibility to protect—with violence if necessary—is morally obtuse.
(Ted Koontz)



“Each individual State has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. . . . We accept that responsibility and will act in accordance with it. . . .”
(Commission report, UN World Summit 2005)



• **Ernie Regehr** is a co-founder and former director of Project Ploughshares, an agency of the Canadian Council of

Churches and supported by Mennonite Central Committee (MCC). He is a former commissioner of the WCC Commission on International Affairs and helped draft the WCC position statement on R2P.



• **Gene Stoltzfus** is a founding director of Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT), having served from 1988-2004.

CPT trains and places violence-reduction teams in such high-conflict situations as Iraq, the West Bank/Israel, Colombia and various aboriginal communities in Canada and the U.S.



• **Ted Koontz** is director of peace and justice studies and professor of ethics and peace studies at Associated Mennonite

Biblical Seminary, Elkhart, Ind.; he was also a pastor in Oklahoma in the 1960s and executive secretary of the MCC Peace Section in the 1970s.



• **Pakisa Tshimika** is associate general secretary of MWC. A Congolese expatriate, he currently lives in Fresno, Calif. In 2005,

his report of a trip back to his homeland was featured in the Oct. 17 issue of *Canadian Mennonite* (“The forgotten emergency”).

Canadian Mennonite: What is the relation between R2P and Christian pacifism? Are the concepts in line with one another, at opposite ends of the spectrum, or somewhere in the middle?

Ernie Regehr: Protecting the vulnerable from violence is clearly a primary concern and objective of Christian pacifists and the emerging R2P doctrine is a welcome move by the international community towards better pursuing that same objective. The commitment to the use of “peaceful means” is at the core of the R2P doctrine. Under Chapter VI of the UN Charter, international protective action is carried out with the consent of the host government to pursue social,

economic and human rights measures designed to prevent social and political disintegration to the point of extreme violence.

In instances of extreme violence, nation-states said in 2005 that they are “prepared to take collective action” under Chapter VII of the Charter on a “case-by-case basis.”

Chapter VII authorizes intervention and the over-riding of national sovereignty when international peace and security are threatened, and the R2P doctrine now says that national sovereignty can also be set aside by force in a country in which the people are in extreme peril. The language linked to the resort to force

World Council of Churches position statement on the Responsibility to Protect doctrine

The 2006 WCC statement reads in part:

“In calling on the international community to come to the aid of vulnerable people in extraordinary suffering and peril, the fellowship of churches is not prepared to say that it is never appropriate or never necessary to resort to the use of force for the protection of the vulnerable. . . .

“[T]he objective must be the welfare of people, especially those in situations of extreme vulnerability and who are utterly abandoned to the whims and prerogatives of their tormentors. . . .

“The resort to force is first and foremost the result of the failure to prevent what could have been prevented with appropriate foresight and actions, but having failed, and having acknowledged such failure, the world needs to do what it can to limit the burden and peril that is experienced by people as a consequence. Just as individuals and communities in stable and affluent societies are able in emergencies to call on armed police to come to their aid when they experience unusual or extraordinary threats of violence, churches recognize that people in much more perilous circumstances should have the right to call for and have access to protection.”

is more circumspect than that applied to peaceful means, but the principle is clear. Although the primary obligation is to use non-military means to protect people, when peaceful means fail to protect the vulnerable it is not acceptable to simply abandon them to their tormentors.

The responsibility of pacifists is not met when they themselves refuse to participate in violent acts. A strong and compelling stand against violence must also include the commitment to try to ensure that vulnerable people are also protected from the violence of others. Pacifists should, therefore, welcome the international community's recogni-

not help but see the pain and grief in their faces. I could also see the sense of frustration because those who were supposed to protect them are also among the perpetrators.

In Kinshasa [the capital city], I heard the same sense of frustration because many political leaders felt that those from the international community—who are supposed to assist them with mediation and non-military humanitarian intervention—are also the nations fuelling the war for economic gains.

Unfortunately, greed for Congolese natural resources is one of the factors fuelling the war. No one is exempt

to take coercive—and, in particular, military—action against another state for the purpose of protecting people at risk in that other state?”

Christian pacifism, on the other hand, is defined by Wikipedia as “the theological and ethical position that any form of violence is incompatible with the Christian faith.” It goes on to state that such a view is a minority one, yet it represents a large perspective within Historic Peace Churches such as our own Anabaptist family. We draw our foundation on our belief that Jesus was a pacifist. He lived and practised pacifism and he calls his disciples to do the same

[T]he R2P doctrine ...acknowledges that the responsibility to protect people in peril does not end when those peaceful means fail. (Ernie Regehr)



tion that it has a collective obligation to protect the vulnerable from violence, and should be active in holding the international community to account on that obligation.

So far, the R2P doctrine is a welcome commitment made in principle, but Darfur, Somalia and the Democratic Republic of Congo, among other places of extraordinary horror, still stand as damning testimony to the fact that the international community has yet to find either the will or the way to consistently act on its commitment.

Pakisa Tshimika: I just came back from the Democratic Republic of Congo, a country destroyed by several years of civil wars and invasion by neighbouring countries. In meeting with women who are the most affected by war and greed, I heard over and over, “Please, *you* help us get rid of those monsters killing us and destroying our future and that of our children.”

Many of what they called monsters are Congolese and others from neighbouring countries terrorizing women and communities, especially in the eastern part of the country.

As I listened to these women, I could

from participating in what is going on in Congo. Anyone using a cell phone is contributing indirectly to the misery of the Congolese people because a high percentage of [the mineral] coltan used in cell phones comes from Congo. It is being taken from Congo through the neighbouring countries to be sold on the world market, not to mention diamonds, gold, timber, uranium and many other natural resources.

When I asked the question regarding what the women meant by *you* in helping them get rid of the monsters, in more cases than not, their answer was without hesitation those people in the U.S., Europe, Canada and Kinshasa who are buying the goods that are supporting the conflict in Congo.

So as I reflect on the UN Responsibility to Protect, and the historical pacifist stand and response to Africa of the Anabaptist family, I view both approaches through those eyes and not just from sitting in my comfortable bed in Fresno, Calif.

As far as the relationship between R2P and Christian pacifism is concerned, it is first a question of definition. R2P was developed to answer the question, “When, if ever, is it appropriate for states

thing. Therefore, the creation of CPT by Ron Sider and other Anabaptists is that expression of obedience to Christ’s teaching.

I believe that at the heart of both of these two approaches is the desire to protect human lives, which Anabaptists believe to be sacred and created in God’s image. If the differences between both of them seem to be so clear in terms of their theoretical perspective, I am not convinced that they are so in practice. These approaches are both driven by economics and the colour of skins. In Africa, the intervention by both camps usually comes when thousands, or millions, have already died. I believe the two approaches tend to meet at the centre of the spectrum and the relationship is not as linear as we might think. It might even be circular.

Gene Stoltzfus: R2P sets a new standard for intervention and protection for civilians when a state cannot, or will not, protect its people. On the political level, this doctrine is intended to provide legitimacy for well-behaved nations to intervene in places like Darfur, Palestine or Zimbabwe, where civil order and human rights are flagrantly violated.

At the root of this discussion, though, is our understanding about how violence is overcome. The habits of making things come out right by means of armed intervention reach back to the founding of organized warfare in the land of Iraq 5,000 years ago. In fact, the premier symbol of nationhood and empire is the military. Nations and empires turn to their soldiers because there is nothing else available that they think works. Governments generally resist change and think short-term. But breaking our habits of turning to military models for solutions requires generations of effort and experiments at all levels.

The hope that violence can be held in check and perhaps melted by non-violent means is good news to a lot of people. "Where have you been all these years?" shouted an Afghani activist when I first met him.

However, it's a bothersome nuisance for those who are stuck in old ways. The growth and success of conflict transformation initiatives should not surprise us. But it often does. In our weaker moments, all of us are tempted to submit to the superstitions about the effectiveness of violence and the use of force that surround us.

Christians of all shades might agree that they have a responsibility to protect and minister to the vulnerable. Certainly, an armed international peace force is a better answer than unilateral "great power intervention." Interestingly, though, this R2P doctrine comes at a time when Mennonite ministries in conflict transformation and peacemaking rooted in biblical pacifism enjoy attention worldwide. I regard R2P as a wake-up call for Mennonites.

Ted Koontz: There can be no doubt that Christians have a responsibility to protect neighbours and enemies whose lives are threatened. When it is possible—and often it is not practically possible, as we are not God and cannot stop all evil, even all egregious evil—we clearly have a responsibility to help such people escape the dangers they face.

We do this through hosting refugees; advocating changes in immigration

policies; providing material assistance to deal with hunger, disease, lack of shelter, etc.; urging governmental and international bodies to apply pressures to stop genocide and create just political processes; intervening CPT-style, with "grandmothers carrying pies and cookies, instead of with soldiers carrying weapons"; and publicizing the plight of those who are suffering. The list of possible nonviolent ways to take up our responsibility to protect is long indeed.

But there are good reasons for Mennonites and others committed to the nonviolent way of Jesus to be sceptical

about recent claims that we have a responsibility to protect people who are victims of violence, even genocide. This is because the R2P doctrine is really the newest guise under which those seeking a Christian justification for shedding blood are hiding.

CM: Is R2P the thin edge of the wedge for giving credence to a Just War theology? (See "Just what is a Just War?" below.) If so, what are the ramifications for those who hold to a strict pacifism? If not, how are the two distinct?

Koontz: Of course, the nonviolent means

MENNONITE REPORTER ARCHIVES PHOTO BY ALLAN SIEBERT



With the help of an overhead projector and rigorous logic, John Howard Yoder explains the presuppositions that underpin the concept of a Just War. Yoder believed that the Just War theory does not take seriously the call of Jesus Christ. The photo was taken at the 1984 peace seminar at Strawberry Creek Lodge in Alberta.

Just what is a Just War?

According to "Overcoming Violence: WCC statements and actions 1994-2000," there are six criteria nation-states must meet in order to enter into what is termed a Just War:

1. There must be a just cause.
2. The aims of the war must follow a just intent, such as the pursuit of a just peace.
3. War must be a last resort.
4. War can be made only by legitimate authority, such as a sovereign government or competent international body.
5. There must be a reasonable prospect of success.
6. War must honour the principle of discrimination, requiring non-combatant or civilian immunity, and avoiding massacres, atrocities, looting or wanton violence; and violence applied in war must be restrained by the principle of proportionality.

I mentioned in answering the first question might not work and the violence against victims might continue. Violence to stop violence frequently fails also, although this is seldom noted in arguments that favour violence to stop violence. Because nonviolence might not work, many Christians advocate a responsibility to protect, by which they mean supporting intervening military violence to stop the existing violence.

Put another way, they argue we have more than one neighbour and we are to love them all. But one group of our neighbours is massacring another group of our neighbours. Doesn't our love of the neighbours who are being massacred require us to stop the massacring neighbours, even if this requires us to kill the "bad" neighbours? Failing to do so would amount to a perverse moral preference for the lives of guilty over the lives of the innocent.

This is a powerful argument for Just

War and against pacifism. But it is by no means a new argument. I cannot make the case for pacifism against this argument here, but Christian pacifist arguments against accepting a responsibility to protect through military interventions on behalf of those suffering great violence are just as strong—or just as weak—as they have been from the time of Christ. Nothing essential has changed, as a bit of history will show.

After several centuries during which Christians were largely pacifist, perspectives changed after the first "Christian" emperor, Constantine. Christian Just War theory originated with Augustine. He argued that he should not fight back if he was personally attacked, but that he should fight to protect others if they were with him. It was on the basis of this love of neighbour that Augustine counselled Christian emperors that they had a responsibility to protect, with violence if necessary, innocent neighbours from

guilty neighbours—or enemies.

The major challenges to pacifism in the last century have all had this same underlying shape, although with different guises:

- *World War II*: Was there not a moral responsibility—based on love of neighbour—to protect through war the innocent victims of Japanese and German slaughter?
- *Revolution*: Is there not a responsibility to protect innocent victims of violent international and national political/economic systems through violence when other means fail? For example, the ongoing situation in Colombia?
- *So-called "humanitarian" interventions*: Should we not support, or participate in, military interventions to save Somalis from chaos and starvation or Rwandans from genocide?

At the heart of Christian arguments for these and other "just wars" is the notion that love of neighbour implies a responsibility to protect, violently if necessary.

In defence of mothers and sisters

What happened when Russian Mennonites thought they had a responsibility to protect themselves

BY HENRY NEUFELD

Special to *Canadian Mennonite*

The ultimate test of nonresistance for Mennonites in Russia occurred during the Bolshevik Revolution. Non-resistance seemed ludicrous to many in the face of mounting violence, but the armed Mennonite resistance reflected a bankruptcy in Mennonite peace theology, according to historian John Toews.

The Russian government had collapsed, the army disintegrated and was fighting amongst itself, and there was no police force—a situation ripe for criminal gangs and would-be warlords wanting to seize power. In that situation in Ukraine from 1918-20, armed gangs came and took whatever they wanted, murdering and raping in the process, Toews says.

A retired history professor (University of Calgary and Regent College, Vancouver), Toews says that when Mennonites found themselves in that chaotic

situation, some decided to resist. They formed an armed militia, the *Selbstschutz* (Self-Defence Unit), whose purpose was to protect, not to fight. Gradually, though, the *Selbstschutz* moved from being protectors to engaging in armed conflict.

In considering armed self-defence, Mennonite church leaders debated the idea. They affirmed the nonresistance principle, but allowed individuals to disagree and follow their own conscience. "A key element of the Mennonite confession of faith was declared optional," says Toews.

In the self-contained and self-governing Mennonite villages of Ukraine the line between government and church was unclear, blurring the interests of church and state. "The Mennonites had made a decision—allowing individuals to join the *Selbstschutz*—and the Mennonite Church is debating its theology of nonresistance when, in fact, it is already compromised," Toews says of the situation.

He does not fully blame the Mennonite pastors, many of whom lacked theological training. They were influenced by German evangelists, whose preaching and teaching brought renewal to the soul along with overtones of German nationalism.

Initially, the self-defence idea seemed logical, as villages were threatened and self-defence was very different from actual participation in war, and protecting family and home was a fundamental duty. Mennonites

Regehr: R2P is not based on Just War theology. If there is a theology behind R2P, it is that all people the world over are children of the same Creator and are called to look after one another. The challenge we face is to find the way and will to consistently and effectively obey that call. Because we often collectively fail to effectively use the peaceful means available to prevent the perpetration of extreme violence against vulnerable people—in fact, our collective failure is regular and egregious—we cannot avoid the challenge of figuring out how to protect people in extreme peril when all prevention has failed.

The R2P doctrine unambiguously calls for the resort to force when peaceful means fail, but it does not propose war. In fact, the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS), the Canadian-sponsored study whose report set out the basic elements of the R2P doctrine, specifically said that

the resort to force to protect the vulnerable “is not a war to defeat a state, but an operation to protect populations in that state from being harassed, persecuted or killed.”

Thus, the commission says, “this means accepting limitations [on the use of force] and demonstrating . . . the use of restraint.” The commission then says that while such restraint “is a clear violation of the principles which govern war operations, one has to keep in mind that operations to protect are operations other than war.”

The R2P doctrine, as adopted by the UN, does not elaborate criteria for the resort to force, except that the international resort to force to protect the vulnerable is to be reserved for the most extreme cases—that is, genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. The ICISS report refers to these conditions as the “just cause threshold”—not in relation to a Just War, but in defining

the conditions that oblige international action, up to and including the restrained use of force in line with what others have called a “just policing” model.

Not all resort to force is the resort to war, even when military forces are involved. The ICISS report lists a number of “precautionary principles” that echo Just War criteria in order to condition the resort to force—namely, right intention, last resort, proportional means, reasonable prospect and right authority, although these are not included in the UN version of R2P.

The obligation to protect vulnerable people—for example, women in Somalia, Darfur or Rwanda, who are subject to systematic and serial rape—is not a slippery slope leading to the justification of war. It is the commitment to come to the aid of victims of extreme violence even when there is no obvious way to do that effectively and even if it means the collective resort to force.

MENNONITE REPORTER ARCHIVES PHOTO



A detachment of armed Mennonite soldiers serving in the Selbstschutz (Self-Defence Unit) of southern Russia during the Bolshevik Revolution in the early part of the last century. They were led by German officers (standing centre).

were seduced into fighting with the “White” Russian army against the “Red” Russians. The Red Army was victorious and consequences began to be felt in Mennonite villages.

The Mennonite foray into militarism came to an ignoble end, Toews reports. Some members of the self-defence group were tried and executed by a military tribunal in Melitopol. Mennonite villages were attacked, people massacred and village buildings were burned—retaliation for armed Mennonite activity.

Toews says the Mennonites finally did what they should have done all along—they organized a prayer meeting and prayed for forgiveness. In times of crisis, he says the interests of the state tend to triumph over the church.

Toews notes that *Selbstschutz* advocates lacked a long-term perspective; to them, non-resistance in the

face of growing violence directed at families, women and children seemed ludicrous. The position of self-defence also reflected a bankrupt theology, so, when faced with violent evil to person and property, the historic peace position seemed an abstract principle.

Toews cautions that 21st century Mennonites not judge their ancestors too harshly. “Like us, they lacked a theology of the suffering church,” he says. For Mennonites in Ukraine, life was comfortable, perhaps too comfortable, he says, drawing parallels with Canadian society today—so they had to learn to become a suffering church.

Henry Neufeld is the MC B.C. representative on the Canadian Mennonite board of directors.

Even though one might “hold to a strict pacifism,” the responsibility to protect is still present when nonviolent means fail. It is important to recognize that a refusal by governments to act in such instances also produces what might callously be called “collateral damage.” The rejection of the resort to force of any kind and in all circumstances, even when there is a reasonable prospect that such intervention would save lives and give some measure of protection to vulnerable people, also has victims.

Tshimika: In February, I asked a woman in eastern Congo what she thought about the UN peacekeepers assisting the Congolese government in launching a major offensive in order to free the region, keeping in mind that many civilians will perish in the process.

“We are already dying now,” she said. “What we want is to preserve our children and the future of this region and the country.”

I don’t think she was thinking in terms of just or unjust. That is a luxury for many of us who are not being oppressed, or being killed, on a daily basis. I wondered from her response if I was not naïve to think that everybody understands the language of pacifism when they have chosen not to take arms. The Congolese experience is showing me that extreme pacifism does not assist countries like Congo or Zimbabwe in dealing with the issues of violence that destroy lives. The paradox in our [Anabaptist] witness is that we are usually the first ones to leave areas of unrest and make declarations once in safe places.

Stoltzfus: A thread of humility helps as we face the actual conditions in the field. None of us who name the name of Christ have invented the perfect path to overcoming violence with love. All of us who strive to create official or private initiatives of violence-reduction, at some point cooperate with armed groups and police—sometimes with some success, often with disappointing results. I have yet to meet an armed group, government or otherwise, that doesn’t at some point abuse its power or become destructive in



The launch of a weapons exchange program in Walungu, Democratic Republic of Congo, brought out a large crowd, including representatives of the country’s military and police forces. The program was initiated in part by the non-governmental organization Mama Makeka House of Hope, of which Pakisa Tshimika is executive director.

the pursuit of just goals.

“What if Hitler had not been stopped?” is the popular question. The what ifs of history surround us. But I ask, “What if Christians had taken the generic New Testament teachings of peacemaking literally and refused to join Hitler’s armies? What if Christians had refused to participate in slavery and the plantation system before the American civil war?”

Christians around the world—with the exception of some in the U. S.—reflected more unity in opposition to the war in Iraq than Christians may have had in many centuries of wars. Some of this opposition resulted from serious engagement with the Bible, some from practical local experience with war and violence in the last century, and some opposition arose from a worldwide renaissance of interest in the gospel of peace.

This renewed interest is a sign of enormous opportunity to deepen our faith in the good news of peace and organize ourselves to turn back violence in places where people are not protected. This is not the time to negotiate away five centuries of Mennonite pacifism.

CM: *If nation-states have a responsibility to protect the citizens of other countries whose governments can’t—or won’t—protect them after hostilities have begun (as the WCC espouses), don’t people within these countries have a legitimate claim to ask these same nation-states to accept a “responsibility to prevent” such horrific situations before they begin? If so, don’t such “pre-emptive strikes” come close to*

the concept of a Just War? If they don’t have the right to make such a claim, why not?

Tshimika: As a public health professional, I always believe that prevention is better than cure. There are not many situations that require intervention where one would say they were not predictable. The situations in Somalia, Congo and Rwanda were predictable, but these situations were just ignored by those who should have assisted in preventing them.

It’s a question of all the parties involved to recognize that their respective destinies are tied to each other. It is like Martin Luther King Jr. suggested when he said we must learn to live together or we will all perish like fools.

Koontz: Yes, we should press governments to “prevent” genocides before they begin. But no, we should not press governments to undertake “preemptive military strikes.”

Regehr: Any action to protect people of other states that involves military coercion must be carried out collectively on the basis of Security Council authorization and according to the UN Charter. It is not individual states, acting on their own authority, that have

the responsibility to protect; rather, the responsibility is that of the international community collectively.

The requirement that collective action be authorized by the UN Security Council—the right authority criterion—is both a safeguard and a major problem. The fact that all five permanent members of the Security Council must agree before an intervention has the authority of the council helps to guard against reckless interventions, but that same requirement for unanimity frequently means inaction, even in the face of extreme violence, as in Rwanda in the mid-1990s and in Sudan today.

No part of the R2P mandate authorizes the resort to force in a relatively stable situation for the purposes of preventing future chaos. The resort to force comes into play when “genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity” are already present or are imminent and apparently unavoidable—in other words, when prevention has demonstrably failed.



It would certainly be possible to make a theoretical case for military pre-emption to prevent extreme suffering, but there is virtually no possibility that such a pre-emptive action would gain Security Council approval.

The overwhelming response of the international community is caution and reluctance to intervene—and the women and children of Darfur, Somalia and Congo pay a heavy price for our caution.

Stoltzfus: Forty years ago I renewed my Anabaptist baptismal vows after five years as a civilian in the Vietnam War. I did so because I believed that the place to start peacemaking was from a people and faith position that would not kill other people or use armed force.

Years later, when I participated in the founding of CPT, I regarded this position to be not only a doctrinal guideline but a strategic advantage in the development of workers and programs. Over the years my thinking unfolded from the negative stance of not killing to more Christ-inspired experiments in nonviolence. Despite occasional periods of isolation and capitulation to violence, I now regard the Mennonite experience of 500 years of peace-living built on Jesus to be an important—and perhaps even crucial—gift in a world teetering on the brink of self-destruction.

An example from the CPT team experience in Colombia illustrates this. When I was visiting there a call for a presence of protection came from a remote village where conflict had broken out between armed groups allied to the government and to underground forces. By the time Scott Kerr, an experienced CPT member, and I reached the village, more than half the people had fled and the firefight was temporarily over. When

armed group arrived and were similarly encouraged to respect the local people.

I believe our presence may have saved lives, property and affected the future of the community. An armed presence of protection may have been less effective in this situation. Additionally, in the long-term an unarmed presence creates space for people to make decisions about their own lives, whereas an armed presence forces compliance and awakens hidden hatred.

CM: *For the sake of the oppressed in places like Darfur, Somalia and Congo, do you think Mennonites should embrace the R2P doctrine, however reluctantly, as maybe making the best of a bad situation? If not, what other options are there?*

Regehr: Yes, Mennonites should most assuredly embrace the R2P doctrine—but not reluctantly.

Our tradition embodies an extraordinary commitment to aiding the vulnerable and we should welcome the 2005 UN Summit commitment by states col-

Despite occasional periods of isolation and capitulation to violence, I now regard the Mennonite experience of 500 years of peace-living built on Jesus to be an important—and perhaps even crucial—gift in a world teetering on the brink of self-destruction. (Gene Stoltzfus)

we arrived, we saw blood. Those who remained were terrorized because they knew that both sides would return and charge individuals in the community with collaboration, with the possibility of further executions.

Indeed, one armed group returned to the village two hours later and began conducting house-to-house searches while their commander sat down with us. My experienced partner talked to him softly and firmly, requesting that his soldiers not enter houses because visiting homes would make the occupants targets of his enemy.

Within minutes, the commander ordered soldiers to stop and within an hour his 30-soldier unit moved out. Later in the day, representatives from the other

lectively “to use appropriate diplomatic, humanitarian and other peaceful means” to try to protect the vulnerable. Our tradition also counsels a deep wariness of the resort to force—and we should continue to be guided by that wariness.

But when the choice is between military intervention modelled on responsible police action that has a reasonable chance of saving lives and protecting people from heinous crimes, on the one hand, and the abandonment of communities to genocide and women and children to such heinous crimes, on the other, then it is not the theology of Just War that should compel us to call on responsible state authorities to protect those subject to extreme and ongoing violence, availing themselves of the

means of restrained force if necessary. That call should come from the theology of a common humanity and a spirit of forbearance.

Of course, there can never be any guarantee that such intervention will be successful. Indeed, in circumstances of extreme lawlessness and endemic violence, there is always the chance that forced intervention will make the situation worse. Therefore, both the methodology

Stoltzfus: Our words are only completed with our actions. Billions of people are now calling out to all Christians—and to us specifically. This is the moment to remember who Mennonites are and how we do things. This is the time to multiply our peacemaking and conflict transformation efforts, maybe by thousands, and invite people of the Spirit everywhere to join in.

If Christians, including Mennonites,

the Spirit has chosen to plant within us, this century will really be different. The children of lions and lambs will truly play together.

Tshimika: I don't think Mennonites should embrace either one of these extremes.

Mennonite World Conference, which brings together all the Mennonites and Brethren in Christ from around the world, sees itself as a "community," which means that our goal is to seek for ways that best express our greater sense of belonging following the example of Jesus Christ. Jesus was not an extremist. He met people where they were.

I know that we are far from being a perfect community, but we should continue to challenge each other to make a reality of Paul's teaching to the Ephesians that we are no longer foreigners or aliens to each other. When that becomes a reality, then and only then will we walk side by side with each other to make a difference in the countries where we are present.

We must strive to promote peace and justice not only in theory—or because that was the way of the 16th century—but because it is the right thing to do in our time. ☸

The paradox in our [Anabaptist] witness is that we are usually the first ones to leave areas of unrest and make declarations once in safe places. (Pakisa Tshimika)

of force and the circumstances in which it is used must be carefully assessed to weigh the risks and the possible benefits of intervention. If such assessment concludes that forced intervention has a reasonable chance of saving many lives that would otherwise be abandoned, we obviously cannot counsel abandonment.

It is the mission and vocation of pacifists to redouble our efforts towards the peaceful prevention of genocide and other horrific crimes against vulnerable people, but when prevention fails nation-states have a responsibility to act. The international community's affirmation, through the UN, of that responsibility is welcome. The next step is to ensure the world goes beyond affirmation to timely action.

Koontz: As I stated earlier, the recent argument for R2P is really just the newest shape of the argument against pacifism. This is not to say it is a weak argument. Any pacifist Christian who has not struggled deeply with the force of the argument that love of neighbour implies a responsibility to protect—with violence if necessary—is morally obtuse.

But this form of the argument is no more right than the other forms of it were when they were used against our pacifist forebears. If we now find it more persuasive, it is likely because we are more wealthy and influential—powerful—than most generations of Mennonites before us. We are in our own Constantinian shift.

can't figure out a way to do better, we must admit that an armed interventionist group is the answer and we may have to get behind it with money, people and organization. However, this will mean putting off finding alternatives to blood-letting and war for another generation.

This is a time of enormous opportunity. This is our time to overcome our caution and compromise. The spirit has given us wide margins of grace. If one million Mennonites and their friends now in every corner of the globe got behind the peacemaking dream that

☸ For discussion

1. Are there situations in our families and communities when we use force to provide protection? Under what conditions would you inform authorities that a neighbour's child needed protection?
2. How effective is violence or the use of force in providing protection? Do you agree with Koontz that "violence to stop violence frequently fails" (page 8)? Was the Mennonite *Selbstschutz* (Self-Defence Unit) able to protect Mennonite women and children?
3. Regehr declares that the R2P doctrine is not based on Just War theology (page 9), while Koontz says it is (pages 7-8). Which argument do you find more convincing?
4. How should the Mennonite Church respond to the World Council of Churches' position on the Responsibility to Protect doctrine (page 5)?