

PEACE EDUCATION

Some reflections on working with adults in the Northern Irish context of violence

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The Northern Irish conflict can be interpreted as an anachronism. This is true in many aspects. However, in the last ten years we were confronted with many 'anachronistic' conflicts: in former Yugoslavia, in Rwanda, Algeria, Colombia, and Afghanistan, to mention only some. In our postmodern times the division of the world into two rather neat halves with two centers of power has gone, the nation state is weakening and in many societies the social glue seems to be losing its cohesive force. We have to live together in pluralistic societies in which we are all a minority at times. Wars between states become less likely, but civil wars are on the increase. Terrorism becomes a power against which the traditional armies and their weapons are quite useless in spite of many technological developments. The ancient laws concerning the protection of women and children in wartime are becoming obsolete. Women are invited to get involved in the armed forces. The child soldier is a well-known phenomenon. In our western society a child's world, which exist in isolation from the adult world, is no longer a possibility.

Some lessons learned in dealing with the Northern Irish conflict might turn out to be worthwhile taking up in other situations. In this paper I reflect with the help of the mimetic theory on peace work done by some Dutch people on behalf of Northern Ireland between 1973 and 1992. The Northern Irish conflict as such is not the subject of this paper; the mimetic interpretation of this conflict was admirably covered by people such as Duncan Morrow and the late Frank Wright (Morrow. 1995; Wright. 1987 and 1996). I concentrate on the educational aspects of Dutch peace work done in the Northern Irish context. Here it suffices to say that the Northern Irish conflict is not a religious one, though religious labels are being used. It is a conflict between two cultures, an Irish one and an Anglo-Saxon or British one.

1 Dutch Peace Work on behalf of Northern Ireland

1.1 A short history

In 1973 I was invited to become a member of staff of a conference for influential Northern Irishmen in the Netherlands. Glenn Williams, then secretary general of the KEK (Conference of European Churches) had asked the Dutch Council of Churches whether it could do something on behalf of Northern Ireland. After some consultation Williams asked the Dutch adult education center 'De Haaf' to accommodate 'mixed Roman Catholic and Protestant Irish groups in a quiet and spiritual atmosphere'. The director of this center, Aat van Rhijn, a Presbyterian minister, asked me to participate in the conference because he wanted a Catholic priest to make the Roman Catholic Northern Irishmen feel represented on the staff.¹ A laywoman, Hermine Keuning, was the third member of the staff. The Dutch Reformed Church provided money. In April 1973 a visit was made to Belfast and contact was established with the Irish Council of Churches; it soon became our Northern Irish counterpart.

In September a first conference was held, quickly followed by a second one. From participants of the first conference a new request for a conference was made and after this one even more conferences were organized, altogether 18 between 1973 and 1983. We worked

¹ I am grateful to Aat van Rhijn for refreshing my memory on many points in this paper.

with neighbourhood groups, politicians, paramilitaries, social workers, police officers, adult educators, social workers, journalists and editors, catholic and protestant clergymen. In the conferences of the protestant politicians and the clergy it was not possible to have a mixed group; we had to be content with having some either Catholic or Protestant 'observers' at the conference.

In the late seventies the security situation in Northern Ireland improved. The necessity of traveling to the Netherlands to have a conference became less evident. Because our work remained in demand, we organized weekends in Northern Ireland itself from 1981 onwards, mainly in Corrymeela, an ecumenical adult education center near Ballycastle.

Money was coming from several sources, but mainly from the Dutch Reformed Church. To handle the money well we decided in 1975 to become a trust: the 'Dutch Northern Irish Advisory Committee'. It was typical of this trust that its constitution stipulated that no conference or any other activity could be undertaken without the consent of the Northern Irish members even when the latter happened to be numerically a minority. The Northern Irish members were so to speak the employers, the Dutch members were the employees, they run the conferences and provided the money as well. In this way meddling in Northern Irish affairs by the Dutch members was prevented. The membership of the committee changed a couple of times. In 1992 the committee was dissolved: it had run its course, people in Northern Ireland took over the work with a new organization 'Understanding conflict... and finding ways out of it'.

1.2 Educational **concept**

Our work was done on the basis of the tradition of Dutch adult education. The starting point of this kind of work is the conviction that every adult is responsible for his or her learning process. The facilitator initiates this process, guards it and tries to shape it. The goal of this learning process is to enable a person to make a contribution to social change and to the improvement of the situation in which he or she finds him/herself. The person is him/herself part of this process.

The learning process takes place in a group. This group represents to a certain extent the social and personal situation in which the participants are living. It is not an arbitrary group such as a school class. It is composed of people who share a similar situation and have the same interests. Though some input from outside the group may be desirable or even necessary, the group itself is often quite knowledgeable. The greater part of any conference is used to communicate to one another the knowledge that is contained in the group itself. The facilitator uses different methods to bring this knowledge to the surface and to promote the exchange of facts, emotions and experience. Every participant shares responsibility for what happens in the group.

The learning process starts by analyzing and defining the common questions and problems of the participants. In this they are already taking their responsibility both for the learning process and for their social and personal situation. The process demands a certain distance from the situation in which the participants live. They leave their home and work for some days and come together in a conference center. They must have an issue, a subject or theme that to some extent unites them, and some awareness of what they want to learn; in the process itself the more concrete aims of the learning process may change. The participants should feel free and secure; a general rule is: 'everything said in this room remains in this room'. The conference center must provide a hospitable environment. At such conferences the informal part is at least as important as the official programmed.

The facilitator ought to provide sufficient information for the participants to analyze the situation and to find ways to deal with it. Input from outside the group may be indispensable. The facilitator must have some insight into the situation from which the

participants are coming. An intake interview and some general exploration of the situation may be required. However, he or she is learning too; the facilitator is not supposed to have a complete analysis of the situation or to be able to offer solutions. This may even hinder his/her listening to what the participants have to say. At the end of the conference the participants evaluate what they learned and try to find ways of applying their knowledge to the situation where they come from.

1.3 **Running a conference**

This educational model was used for our conferences. The issue was always the same: how to promote peace in Northern Ireland. The participants left their country: the security situation often demanded this, but it was part and parcel of the learning process as well. In this way they were able to look at their situation from a distance and to reflect on their responsibility in this violent predicament. Our - certainly at the beginning - very limited knowledge of the ins and outs of the Northern Irish society turned out to be a great asset. By posing our 'stupid' questions the participants were forced to profoundly reflect on what was self-evident for them. Going to the Netherlands appealed to the Northern Irish because 'King Billy', William of Orange, king of England, is a part of Northern Irish history and mythology. (Most Dutch people are hardly aware of this.)

Being abroad (often for the first time), having been invited free from charge, the working method and above all the presence of the staff made it possible that the Catholic and Protestant participants could have talks, even confrontations, without a polarization that would have made the progress of the process impossible. Feelings of resistance among the participants were used by the staff to bring about change. The fact that the Catholics often used an Irish passport to come to the conference and the Protestants a British one gave an opportunity to reflect on what identity entails.

We always started the formal part of the program by a lecture by a high Dutch civil servant on the way the three groups within Dutch society (Protestants, Catholics, liberals/socialists) had succeeded to live together as 'three peoples rolled into one'. The way Protestants, Catholics and liberals/socialists formed their 'pillars' in Dutch society never failed to evoke amazement and often gave to the participants the feeling that the way Catholics and Protestants are living together in Northern Ireland is not all that bad, at least not in more peaceful times. Depending on the composition of the group we invited more lecturers, organized meetings with politicians, high police officers, representatives of local authorities, media people, neighborhood workers etc. We always made one or more trips to a place of interest for the group. The purpose never was to show off - look how civilized our police are and how sophisticated our politicians are - nor to suggest that Dutch solutions for Dutch problems could be of use for Northern Ireland. Lectures and trips provided a mirror by which the participants could analyze their own situation and were stimulated to find their own solutions. The Dutch way of doing things was presented as a way of dealing with 'social conflict and social change' - the title of our first conference.

On Sundays both a catholic mass and a protestant service were celebrated; all participants were invited to take part in both services but everybody was free to decline.

1.4 **Dealing with conflict**

At the beginning our knowledge of conflict theories was limited. Our purpose was to find a common ground between the participants. Can you as members of the same neighborhood find a common ground in providing playing fields for children and social centers? Can you as members of paramilitary organizations, which have to make money to help out prisoners' wives, have a common interest in the process of building up cooperatives? Don't you have the problem of unemployment in common? We slowly realized that having something in common

is the root of violence as well - why have a conflict if you have nothing in common? We learned to distinguish between 'associated' (almost messianic) peace and 'dissociative' peace - in other words, separating the conflicting parties as much as possible. A solution to the Northern Irish conflict seemed out of the question, but would it be possible to regulate the conflict? For a brief period we tried to look for common symbols, only to soon discover that symbols are of major importance in Northern Ireland and continually are the object of rivalry.

In our visits to Northern Ireland in preparation for our conferences we learned that the more sophisticated the struggle against terrorism became the more sophisticated the terrorists became. We noted the weakening of the political center and the rise in power of the extremes, especially when some action or political move seemed to bring some victory to either Catholics or Protestants. We became aware of the strong emotional bonds people in Northern Ireland have with the word 'community'. We discovered that many people in Northern Ireland had much to lose when peace would come: subsidies for businessmen, impressive technical tools and high salaries for policemen, interest from the international press for politicians, full churches for the clergy. It dawned on us that at the same time we were dealing with two minorities and two majorities in Northern Ireland: the Protestant majority in Northern Ireland is a minority in the whole of Ireland, the Catholic minority in Northern Ireland is a majority in the whole of Ireland. Moreover, while the Catholics do not have any doubts about their Irish identity, the Protestants are uncertain about what their identity as loyalists - loyalty to the British Crown - entails. Generally they feel more threatened and on our conferences they were more defensive than the Catholics. All the Churches in Ireland - so we learned - seem to stand for morality rather than for a spirituality of liberation. They all tend to be rather fundamentalist, either concerning scriptural exegesis or dogma. Though the representatives of the media claimed that they were only reporting events, it became clear to us that the media are a part of the conflict; the terrorists are aware of this and often plan their killings at such a time that a full report could be expected. At one time we were present at the moment that the coffins of two young men, victims of a sectarian killing, were carried out of their houses to be brought to church for the funeral: the women and children standing in the door, the men guarding the street. We 'saw' the division into gender, the women ruling over the house, the men guarding the public space. We always had very few women at our conferences and we now understood why. Subsequently we succeeded in organizing some study days for women in Belfast. Partly through them we discovered that the relationship between mother and son is more important in Northern Ireland than the one between wife and husband. All those insights were taken up in our running of the conferences.

From 1978 onwards we came into contact with the work of René Girard. From about 1981 the mimetic theory became an integral part of our work. It placed all those insights we had gathered into perspective. We saw the mimetic theory 'in action' in front of us: mimesis, the mimetic desire, model/obstacle, differences, rivalry, escalation, contagion, Scapegoating. The theory made us aware of the mythologies of the Irish struggle against Britain and of the partly pagan and partly Christian background of those mythologies (Kearney, 1978). One of the most striking examples is the poster of the Irish nationalist P. Pearse, lying in the lap of 'mother Ireland' with the republican tricolor in her hand, which was spread around Dublin after his execution in 1916. This picture is a clear reference to both Christ and to the strong desire to shed one's blood for 'mother Ireland' and to become one of Ireland's heroes. The sacrificial character of the spirituality and theology of the Churches in Northern Ireland became clear to us. The mimetic theory helped us to read Scripture with new eyes and to interpret religion, as among other things, a way of finding peace in society. This is very relevant for Northern Ireland where church going and religious symbols are still very important.

This brought about a change in the goals of our conferences, especially of those in Corrymeela center: the introduction of the mimetic theory itself became our educational goal. We offered this theory as a possibility of reflecting on the Northern Irish conflict. We were able to convince high police officials that there was a strong similarity between policemen and terrorists and together we tried to find a way out. During the last years of my activities in Northern Ireland I was active in working with groups reading scriptural texts because some of them are used as shibboleths and are as such a part of the conflict (Lascaris, 1993).

1.5 Results

What were the results of our work? It is difficult to measure this. How does one register a killing not executed, a brick not being thrown, an increase in mutual understanding? Some results were very visible: a community center set up, a more balanced way of reporting 'incidents', a smoother running of a peace group. In 1975 the Feakle cease-fire came into being as an indirect result of our third conference; a participant, the Rev. Bill Arlow, initiated those peace talks on the basis of his experience of the dialogue between Protestants and Catholics in this conference. People learned to listen to and to respect those from the other side of the divide. People changed and got a different perspective on the so-called 'troubles'. How this worked out in their individual lives and in their contribution to society cannot be recovered. The decision of people in Northern Ireland to continue our work in a new way was perhaps the best result of all.

We who ran the conferences were immensely enriched. We learned a great deal intellectually. Being touched by the suffering of people in Northern Ireland enriched our humanity. We met many people from very different walks of life and every meeting was a challenge, a confrontation, and an enriching moment. The peace work done on behalf of Northern Ireland left many traces in my theological work.

Some conferences were close to a disaster. In one or two conferences, both in Holland and in Northern Ireland, the so-called key people did not turn up. The secret conference with the paramilitaries in November 1975 - some of the participants were high ranking in their organizations - went well though we did not succeed in bringing about much informal contact. At the end someone, probably the second in command of the Ulster Defense Association, leaked to the international press. Though everybody stayed and the conference continued it was not possible to achieve anything and to initiate a similar conference later. The journalists of the 1983 North-South Communications conference lost interest when in the middle of it all Margareth Thatcher called for new elections. The Roman Catholic clergy conference (June 1977) failed, partly because of a lack of freedom in the group in which no one dared to take the risk of being seemingly disloyal, partly because they felt attacked by being confronted with the Dutch Catholic Church. We as a staff lost all credibility in their eyes when they thought they heard a Dutch protestant lady using the word 'contraceptives' though she only said 'family planning'.

Another recurrent problem was that afterwards several participants soon changed job or got another position or rank; this happened especially to social workers and police officers. They needed all their energies to adapt to their new job and lost somehow what they had discovered and learned on the conference. We often lost contact with them.

Looking back, we do not have the illusion of having made a major contribution to the peace process in Northern Ireland, but we sowed some seeds. One of the limitations of this kind of work is that it is impossible to keep track of the participants of a conference. This is not even desirable: people have to go back to their own situation, of which we do not form a part. Not being native English speakers and not having grown up with the fact that in Northern Ireland the same words often have a different meaning for Catholics and Protestants, we sometimes overestimated the possibility of finding a common language. We clearly

underestimated the strength of the mimetic relationship people have with the group they come from: their loyalty to the group and to the past - often invisible and unspoken -, their fear of being seen as a defector by family, friends and colleagues.

Peace work is a serious business but we had our hilarious moments as well. At the first conference part of the luggage arrived one day late so that Protestants had to make use of 'Catholic' shavers and Catholics had to wash with 'Protestant' soap. After that we prayed before every conference that the same thing would happen again and sometimes the Airways complied. A Catholic priest and a hard line Orange lady getting lost together in the village helped the whole group to cement together. We were impressed by the protestant politicians who refused consistently to drink alcoholic liquor until after the conference we found numerous whisky bottles under the beds - all of them empty.

2 Some Reflections

In the second part of this paper I offer some reflections on Girard's view on education, our educational work on behalf of Northern Ireland, the usefulness of the mimetic theory in conflict situations, peace education in teaching institutions, the mimetic character of justice and the limits of peace education.

2.1 René Girard and education

René Girard did not write much on education. According to him children are not able to make a distinction between what should or should not be imitated. Children simply imitate. I agree so far. The teacher is pleased, he says, about the progress his pupil is making until the moment the pupil seems to surpass the teacher: then the teacher will become hostile instead of helpful (Girard, 1978, 314-315). Here Girard seems to rely on his experience of the relationship between a supervisor and a research student in university or even to refer to Socrates and the Socratic tradition. However, this is a very restricted view of teaching that is rightly criticized (Haas 109-118). Most teaching happens in groups. The pupils imitate one another more than that they imitate the teacher. When the class or group is insecure it is more likely that one of the classmates is scapegoated than the teacher. The teacher is far above them as an 'exterior mediator' or a 'transcendent figure'. A good teacher will accept it as one of his tasks to keep order and to prevent such hostile rivalries between his pupils that chaos abounds and teaching becomes impossible. She/he may try to promote rivalry in order to challenge everybody so as to get better teaching results but he/she will know that there are limits to this. Skilled teachers will be aware of the disastrous consequences for pupils who are being scapegoated by their classmates and will do their utmost to prevent this happening. The teacher will take care that the subject matter remains in the center and will offer interesting material so that he/she acts as a facilitator rather than presenting him/herself as a model to be imitated. The pupils will imitate the teacher by concentrating on the skill or subject that is being taught.

Moreover, in many schools pupils work in small units in which cooperation rather than competition is promoted. This kind of teaching makes the children partly responsible for their learning process and for the learning process of the group. They are free albeit within limits to learn in their own way. The pupils thus are placed on the road to adulthood. The child discovers that something outside and above him/herself - in this case the subject matter and the learning process - is desirable rather than to become like a fellow child or like the teacher and to end up in rivalry.

We may mourn the loss of close educational relationships between teachers and pupils and between parents and their children. In many families children have their own TV-set,

computer and computer games. Parents hardly know what the children learn at school, watch on TV and the Internet and which games they play. However this loss may be a profit as well. Children will have more models to be imitated and, though it may take more time to become an adult, they will have more space to make choices and to be free from double binds; they will rival less their parents and teachers. They may become more creative. This creativity that originates in the meeting with a variety of models will be much needed. For in our postmodern time education cannot pretend to prepare pupils to enter a world, which is more or less like the world in which their parents and teachers live. The world in which they and their children will live may be very different and reveal great ruptures with the past.

In today's world the personal integrity of parents and teachers is at least as important as their educational skills. If parents and teachers who try to live in a responsible way become worthwhile models to be imitated, their children may be able to view themselves as active, historical subjects and to accept their responsibilities for peace, justice and the preservation of life (Vriens 410; Haavelsrud 264). After all, the latter is the true purpose of any education.

2.2 Our **educational work**

Looking back at our conferences, it was possible to work with rival parties within one group because there was some kind of 'transcendence' or 'exterior mediator'. This 'transcendence' was formed by several different factors. The whole process was initiated and guarded by an 'exterior mediator': the invitations came from abroad, a staff composed of foreigners who lived outside the conflict, going abroad in exile so to speak, meeting people who did not always understand and spoke English and had to be interpreted, the learning process, discovering new methods of learning, being confronted with the strange solutions of a foreign country to regulate its conflicts, meeting with strange, even shocking habits such as eating raw herring, discovering they have quite a lot in common over against those foreigners and their culture. It was not an evil 'transcendence': a hospitable place to stay, a staff that guaranteed security so that it was possible to speak in relative freedom, people who were interested in the 'troubles'. Even when we worked in Northern Ireland being foreigners was an asset: we remained almost literally 'exterior mediators'.

The staff was of course scapegoated but this was a cultural event, not a personal one. It drew feelings of insecurity, hostility, respect and gratefulness towards itself and made it thus possible for the group to work together in relative peace. It was not possible to drive this 'scapegoat' out with verbal or even physical violence because the distance between participants and members of the staff was too great. Moreover the staff always pointed away from itself towards the responsibility of the group and of each participant for social change in Northern Ireland.

Every culture is based on violence. Education is a cultural activity. It may make a contribution to the transformation of society, but it cannot place itself outside culture with its violent past. By being transferred to a place outside their country, people were partly placed outside their culture. Their language, customs and identities traveled with them, but a small distance was created over against them. Dutch society may be as violent as the Northern Irish one, but it was different. The adult education center 'De Haaf' provided a 'spiritual' place where at least people were aware that there is a promise of a world to come without violence. In Northern Ireland the adult education center 'Corrymeela' tries to be such a place. Such places always have difficulties to balance accounts for they do not fit in in our society. Having such centers offers rich opportunities of making a contribution to social change.

2.3 **Usefulness of the mimetic theory**

Our work suggests that interventions, based on the mimetic theory, that promote peace and overcome conflict can be made on a personal level. Because individuals change groups may change as well. Institutions, how unassailable they look like, are populated by individuals and can be changed too, though the road may be long and weary. We soon discovered that it was possible to convince, for example, high police officers to do something unexpected so as to break the vicious circles of violence, but concerning decision making they were always dependent on many other people, such as British and Irish politicians, who again felt dependent on other politicians and on the electorate. The practical effects of peace work based on the mimetic theory are thus limited, at least in the short run. However, this is probably true of any peace work. In the gospels Jesus shows himself to be a master in the application of the mimetic theory and in finding paradoxical solutions, but his success was very limited in his lifetime.

2.4 Peace **education at school**

As far as I know peace education is not a regular teaching subject in schools and universities anywhere in Europe. When peace education takes place explicitly, it is nearly always as part of the curriculum of religion, history or sociology. Racism may be a special theme within a larger subject. Other themes may be: information about a conflict such as in Northern Ireland, political and economic relationships, and the richness of cultural differences. On the basis of my work in Northern Ireland I suggest that teaching the mechanisms of conflict and violence and especially the mimetic theory should form the heart of any peace education. It may well have an immediate impact. Children have to deal with conflicts all the time, conflicts with fellow pupils, with teachers and parents. Scapegoating in the class may easily occur. Many children carry weapons with them at school because somehow they feel threatened or they hope to make some impact on their rivals. They are confronted with violence in the streets. Where religion is taught the gospel stories can contribute a lot of educational material. Religion has more to offer to peace action than mere motivation (Jeurissen. 1993). For teachers in religion this has the extra advantage that they can show that those stories are often about conflict and peace and as such can teach us something about conflict in today's world.

2.5 Justice **and forgiveness**

Reflecting on our work in Northern Ireland, I have come to the conclusion that the source of violence is the thirst for justice. People always try to justify their use of violence by appealing to their right to restore injustices done to them in the past or in the present. Justice reveals itself to us as mimetic reciprocity. Children and adults alike want to pay back both the good things received and the injuries incurred (See: Boszormenyi Nagy). We always are involved in a kind of accountancy. When the child's debts to his parents and other members of the family or when their debts to the child are not settled in childhood, all the people involved will try to take this out on other people, their partner, their children, on colleagues, neighbors and strangers. The latter become their scapegoats by which they try to find inner peace and justice. The dimension of justice is fundamental for human life in such a way that when something goes wrong between people, it always entails the question as to whether justice was done. Justice and injustice trickle down into the deepest layers of a person and either cleanse or poison the source of life. In case of injustice all other relationships are disturbed, those with oneself, with other people and with God.

Justice is based on mimesis. The mimetic character of justice is well expressed in the ancient formula 'you shall give life for life, eye for eye, tooth for tooth, hand for hand, foot for foot, burn for burn, bruise for bruise, wound for wound' (Ex. 21:23-25). Originally this 'law' already regulated violence and set bounds to it: the victim is not allowed to ask for more than the eye, the tooth or the hand he lost himself. In the Old Testament revenge - a word that is

much closer to 'justice' in biblical Hebrew than in modern languages - only entails the death of the perpetrator in the case of murder, of manslaughter and of bearing false witness that results in the death of the accused. In all other cases the perpetrator is not punished with bodily harm but has to pay a fine and make good the damage.

Justice is fundamental to human life. If justice is impossible, life becomes meaningless. Violence is the denial of the right of existence; somehow this right has to be restored. The rightful demand that justice should be done often results in a new act of violence. A circle of endless retaliation starts. However, it is possible to renounce taking revenge and instead to forgive. The victim cannot be forced to forgive for this would be another act of violence. Forgiveness is rather a liberating vision to be offered to the victim. Actually, many victims do forgive, often surprisingly so.

Violence becomes superfluous when forgiveness is a real possibility. Forgiveness is an antidote to violence. In both the Old and New Testaments injustice is not an isolated act of some individual; injustice is a word that denotes a broken and unjust relationship. Forgiveness is not a feeling but is the creation of a new set of relationships. It is saying to the perpetrator: in spite of what you have done to me and in spite of my anger and grief and though I hope to never meet you again, go in peace and lead a fruitful life. Forgiveness is re-creating the world, putting an end to violence, bringing about new and just relationships.

In and after the exile forgiveness increasingly became a central theme in the Old Testament; we do not know why this is so (Koch 184-206). The Old Testament is convinced that forgiveness can be granted, albeit on certain conditions: justice has to be done and justice entails reciprocity. The guilty person has to admit his or her guilt, must make good the damage and has to pay an extra one fifth of the value of the damage to the injured party. Subsequently, receiving forgiveness is confirmed in a sacrifice in the temple (Lev. 6:1-7) (Sanders. 1992. 47-145).

Jesus was one of those wandering preachers who hoped for a restoration of Israel. For him, as for every Jew, sinners were people who violated the order of justice and made human life meaningless. In this Jesus did not differ from his contemporaries. Modern scholars agree that Jesus only departed from the religious and social practice of his time in one aspect: he forgave unconditionally (Sanders. 1985; Dunn). He granted forgiveness so that people would change their ways. This seems to be a minimal change; most scholars note it but do not realize that this is the turning point between Old and New Testament. Jesus, for example, accepted tax collectors - they were both political collaborators and extortionist - into his group that was supposed to be the image of how the new and restored Israel should look. Many tax-collectors were excluded from the believing community for ever because they were not able to fulfill the conditions laid down in Lev. 6:1-7.

Granting forgiveness, and above all unconditional forgiveness, is beyond ordinary human possibilities, for human beings grow up and become adults having learned to act on the basis of mimetic reciprocity. Anthropologically speaking Jesus refers to the situation between parents and infant: in this situation an infant is cared for without demands on him or her to pay back this benefit in any way.

From a theological point of view unconditional forgiveness sets people free from violence. Injustice is not responded to with violence according to the law of reciprocity. A new set of relationships is created.

Therapies can empower people to manage once again their lives after terrible traumatic events, but they cannot give people the ability to forgive. It is impossible to require the power of forgiveness by education or by doing a therapy or by forcing oneself to it because the Church tells you to do so. In preaching the emphasis is often placed on the fact that God forgives people; this is true and it often becomes a stepping stone to the gift of being able to forgive. However, the ability to forgive unconditionally is the greatest gift of the gospel to

this world. It is the true antidote to violence. Nations as such cannot forgive, but individuals can, and thanks to mimesis they can inspire other people to forgive as well so that an influential group emerges that is able to forgive and can change the course of history of a nation though it may well be a minority group. In Northern Ireland forgiveness is slowly appearing on the religious, social and political agenda (The Faith and Politics Group).

2.6 Limits of education

Education will not save the world for it is itself a cultural reality. In Northern Ireland both parties use it as an instrument for the preservation of their social and religious order. Both culture and education have to be transformed; this can only happen in a long process of social change. People may think that peace education is superfluous when a social conflict has been regulated and seemingly 'peace' has descended on the land. The institutes that provide peace education may belie this work through their institutional violence and the violence of teachers and pupils. The ability to forgive may be a theme of discussion in teaching but education cannot give this ability. Peace education can give to people insights into the mechanisms of violence, make them reflect on their cultural and social situation and try to convince them to take their responsibility for peace. However, this modest contribution may be worthwhile devoting one's life to.

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