

THE CROSS AND PEACE: A reply to Wayne Northey

by Robert Shaw

ABSTRACT

In this paper I offer an alternative analysis of violence to that offered by Wayne Northey (JR 143 Issue 19; 2008) based on the observation that most violence, whether between individuals, groups or nations, occurs between people who have a relationship. In the first part of the paper, I offer some observations on the arguments in Northey's paper; in the second, I suggest an alternative analysis which I believe makes better sense of the experiences of victims and offenders and also of the processes of forgiveness, repentance and reconciliation.

THE NATURE OF VIOLENCE

Northey defines violence as '*the purposeful, active destruction of the well-being of fellow human beings, ...*' (p. 1); however, this is too narrow. What victims experience as violence is often purposeless and careless while violent offenders tend to see violence as a means of preserving their well-being, if necessary at the expense of the well-being of others, rather than as a means of destroying the well-being of others. Of course, some do seek to destroy the well-being of others because they are jealous of their well-being but they are in a minority.

More importantly, I have great difficulty with the argument that '*violence is the foundation of human culture*' (p. 4). We have around 6,000 years evidence from cultures for which at least some texts exist; though in most of these cultures there have been periods of violence, there is no evidence that violence has been a key feature of these cultures for most of their existence. Of course, there are examples such as Roman or Aztec culture where violence towards human beings was elevated to an art form but neither of these lasted very long in comparison with, for example, Sumerian or Egyptian culture. Among the foes of the Jews, the Assyrians were acknowledged to be the most violent but, after his 'shock and awe' capture of Babylon, Cyrus built a remarkable

culture based on toleration which even some of his subjects found difficult to comprehend (see Nehemiah, *passim*), as indeed did some of Alexander's Macedonian generals three hundred years later when he advocated treating all races equally.

I do not have access to David Livingstone Smith's recent book *The Most Dangerous Animal* as it has not been published outside the US. However, there are sound reasons for rejecting his arguments as set out by Northey.

Firstly, as Margulis and Sagan (1995) demonstrate, the history of evolution has been one of cooperation and not of conflict and much of what we as human beings are able to do depends on bacteria that live in harmony within us. Far from being '*wired to fight*' (p. 11) human beings are built on cooperation; only the immune system is wired to fight those bacteria and their offspring that threaten to upset the cooperation that we have, from one perspective, developed over millions of years of evolution and also, as well as from another perspective, been given by God.

Secondly, all deterministic explanations are ultimately anti-Christian because they deny the possibility of real change. If we are wired for anything, then even after we have repented and changed the way we think about the world, we will remain under the influence of this wiring and, more importantly, tempted to blame this wiring for our failings to love our neighbour as ourselves rather than to accept responsibility for our failings.

Thirdly, there is no evidence that many of those who commit violence lack the capacity to repent what they have done and, indeed, those who have committed the worst acts of violence are more likely to regret what they have done and to live lives without violence thereafter. If their original violence had been '*hard-wired*' into them, these transformations, particularly among non-believers, would be far less frequent than they are.

Fourthly, I would agree with Smith that, when people commit violence, they '*do not know what they are doing*' (p. 12) but there is no need to introduce delusion to explain this. The Greek word *oidasin* is associated with the word for seeing and therefore with experiencing, seeing something in the mind's eye, being personally acquainted with a fact or feeling (Liddell and Scott, 1996) . This makes far better sense of violent offenders' accounts of how they could not see any other way of dealing with the situation; they did not

act violently because they were suffering from a delusion; they acted violently because they were unable to see what they were doing in their mind's eye and/or lacked the experience to see what they were doing to their victim.

Indeed, Smith cites David Grossman in *On killing* as referring to 'the horror of killing in combat' (p. 13); those who have experienced this *oidasin*. However, Northey draws the wrong conclusion from 'The first kill is the hardest' (p. 13). The mythical James Bond does not reflect the reality of killing; most serial killers do not plan to become serial killers. They find themselves in a situation where they commit a murder which goes undetected and, having learned that this is a possible way of dealing with situations, repeat it.

Not being able to see, i.e. *idein*, what is actually going on helps to explain both incidents like the sexual abuse at Abu Grahیب and the desire of the Pentagon to suppress images that might help us to see in our mind's eye. As charities have found, we are far more likely to give to someone whom we are able to see as a person (Cole, 1998) and, conversely, in order to abuse someone, it helps if we can find excuses not to see, i.e. *ouk idein*, them as a person.

The most powerful example of this came in December 1914 when soldiers from both sides celebrated Christmas together and the incidents were hushed up by the military authorities because they knew that, once the troops began to see the other side as human beings, they would become reluctant to kill them. Far from being 'hard wired' for violence, the soldiers of World War I had to be prevented from seeing the other side as human beings, the reason why military authorities pay attention to dehumanising their recruits (p. 18).

Northey is right to castigate St Augustine of Hippo; he argued that torture was justified because, in the parable of the wedding guests, the host had told his slave: *anankason* (Luke 14:23), i.e. compel, people to come in, a word which does not occur in the other Gospel accounts (de Ste Croix, 2006). From justifying one act of violence, primarily for use against non-Roman Christians, it was easy for St Augustine to expand his arguments to encompass other acts of violence and, while on the one hand saying that slavery was evil, to justify it with a similarly distorted exegesis of scripture (de Ste Croix, 1975). He provided a template from which all those who wish to justify the abuse of their fellow human beings can clothe their actions in some sort of perverted rationality.

THE ORIGINS OF VIOLENCE

There is no evidence that new-born children are inherently violent; on the contrary, children who make a secure attachment with their parents/carers and are supported as they make relationships with other children learn a whole range of social skills which preclude any need to resort to violence (Ladd, 2005). Those who resort to aggression do so almost certainly for the same reason as adult violent offenders, that is, they cannot see any other way forward in a situation in which they find themselves. They then tend to be rejected by their peers and, missing out on peer group experiences which will enable them to develop non-violent social skills, continue to use aggression.

However, an infant's view of the world is inherently egocentric and, as children grow older, they move gradually towards less egocentric ways of thinking about the world (Gilligan, 1993). My father argued that the motivation for 'original sin' (Northey, 2008, p. 3) was described in Genesis 3:5 when the serpent said 'you will be like gods.' All sin involves seeing ourselves at the centre of the universe as we did naturally as infants. The process of moving away from egocentricity begins earlier for girls than for boys as girls prefer to negotiate conflicts rather than to assert mastery but the price is that girls' relationships are often more stressful than boys' as they try to deal with the conflicts they encounter (Ladd, 2005).

Moreover, children are less able both to see, i.e. *idein*, the consequences of their actions, including violent ones (Newson et al., 1977), and to distinguish different forms of aggression until their teens (Ladd, 2005). Boys are more likely to be subject to physical assaults than girls (La Fontaine, 1991), a pattern which continues into adulthood with males perpetrating more physical violence and females more emotional violence, reflecting I would argue boys' preference for achieving mastery and girls' preference for paying attention to relationships which gives women a greater capacity than men to use relationships both positively and negatively.

Gilligan (1993) argues that the process of moving from seeing ourselves as the centre of the world takes women through a stage in which they subordinate their wishes to those of others before they reach a stage of recognising that self and other are equally important. However, men are less likely to see their behaviour in terms of personal relationships (Gilligan et al., 1988) and more in terms of its impact on their status (Tannen, 1992).

Bolton (1973) has argued that this was why Christianity made so much more headway within Greek than within Jewish culture. Greek culture was based on the *time*, honour or value, of gods and men and it was assumed that men would guard their *time* not just for themselves but for their wives and children whose own *time* depended on their husband's or father's *time*. Jesus' sacrifice overturned these relationships because it was an act of *agape*, or love, on the part of God which conferred *time* on women and men.

So the crucifixion is both an act of *agape*, an expression of God's affection for humanity which will resonate with women, and an act of *time*, which will resonate with men's desire for status. But, whereas the crucifixion opens the way for many different expressions of *agape*, *philotimia*, or love of honour, which was supposed to motivate men's behaviour, has to be transformed into being ambitious for God (Romans 15:20) because we cannot receive a greater honour than to be loved by God.

Honour, or *time*, and status are impersonal as is *philia*, love between acquaintances, but *agape* is personal; it engages our emotions, not just our thoughts, and when our emotions overwhelm us, they can sometimes lead us to do things we would not do in the absence of those emotions. That is why both Christians and non-Christians, from Saul (Acts 8:3) to Richard Dawkins (2006), can be so passionate about their beliefs; they have been sufficiently affected by God's gift of his Son that they cannot be indifferent – they must either accept or reject God's love. 'Love and hate are not opposites. The opposite of love is indifference' (Neill, 1962, p. 263). Indifference is only possible in the absence of strong feelings.

Violence can arise from love, hate or indifference. Love can provoke violence when the person receiving the love feels unworthy of it; those who take on the care of children who have been deprived or emotionally damaged, whether adoptive or foster parents or staff in children's homes, can experience this. The child cannot believe, because they have probably already received many indications from others of their lack of worthiness, that anyone can really love them and they may push the person to the limits of their love, including through acts of sometimes extreme violence. If the person or persons concerned continue to love the child, the child is eventually reassured that they are a person worthy of love and can begin to build a sense of identity as a person able both to receive love from and to give love to others.

This is the one case which always fits Northey's definition of violence as '*the purposeful, active destruction of the well-being of fellow human beings*' (p. 1). The child sets out to destroy another human being because their love for her/him is too much to handle. However, in the face of the person's continuing love, the child normally comes to the point where they no longer wish to destroy the person and they pull back from their original aim; in a small number of cases, normally involving children who have been very seriously emotionally damaged, they do not and, unless there is someone around to protect the loving person, the love can end in tragedy.

Hate can provoke violence against self and against others. A child may fail to establish a satisfactory relationship with their carer or with their peer group – the two may go hand in hand because, without the former, a child often finds it difficult to make acceptable relationships with her/his peer group. In this case they may experience negative self-perceptions whether of less self-regard or victimisation which are associated with lower achievement throughout their lives (Ladd, 2005). Seeing themselves as of little value, they may see little value in others or they may seek to diminish the value of others in order to bring it down to, or below, the level at which they see themselves. The former is the origin of much careless violence in which the person, because they see little value in themselves, sees little value in caring for themselves or in protecting themselves from the violence they may receive as a result of the violence they mete out to others. The latter is the origin of violence which is not normally intended to destroy the other's well-being but simply to reduce it to a level where the person no longer sees themselves as of less value than others. In this case, destroying others' well-being serves no purpose because there is nothing against which to measure the person's reduced sense of well-being.

Indifference is the origin of most careless violence. Children who have never made any attachments, described over sixty years ago by Bowlby (1944) as 'affectionless,' have no reason to value anyone else because, without emotional attachments to people, they see them simply as objects against which it does not matter whether or not one perpetrates acts of violence. They are similarly indifferent to themselves and often treat their bodies as objects of experimentation, normally with serious consequences for their own health or lives. In general, violence arising from indifference is less severe than violence arising from love or hate because there are no strong emotions behind it but it tends to be longer lasting and often more destructive in the end.

In childhood, even where a child is not indifferent to others, some of this behaviour is also affected by the child's lack of understanding of consequences or of the finality of physical death (Anthony, 1973); for the most part young children do not have the capacity to take their feelings out on another to the extent of killing them. However, their lack of understanding of the consequences of their actions can lead to a young child inadvertently doing so (Sereny, 1995). A similar lack of understanding is behind many road deaths at the hands of young drivers and some deaths at the hands of older people with a learning disability.

Apart from violence which is a function of relationships, violence may arise from the dynamics of interaction. George Jepson, the far-sighted superintendent of The Retreat, the Quaker home for people suffering from a mental illness opened in 1796, argued that much violence on the part of people suffering from a mental illness was not long-standing or deep-seated but related to a 'provocation' that the person had received, whether intentionally or inadvertently, from a carer (Glover, 1984). More recently, it has become customary, certainly with the UK, for young people to explain certain violent encounters as arising from lack of 'respect' on the part of one party which was seen as a provocation by the other party.

In the Stamford Prison Experiment (Haney et al., 1973) volunteers were arbitrarily assigned the roles of warder and prisoner; those given the role of 'warder' became progressively more brutal to the 'prisoners' until the experiment had to be stopped, interestingly at the insistence of a female interviewer, Christina Maslach, who had been asked to conduct some interviews after the experiment had been running for several days. The leaders of the experiment *ouk oidasin* and had to be prompted by her to recognise what was going on (Zimbardo et al., 2000). The reactions of Zimbardo and his colleagues may go some way to explaining why people may be violent to others as part of interactions but not recognise, i.e. *ouk oidasin*, what is going on.

The idea that violence is situational has received support from a recently published study of homicide in Britain which shows, among other things, that, though the overall homicide rate has risen, the rate has actually fallen in wealthier neighbourhoods but increased in poorer neighbourhoods while guns are two and a half times more likely to be used in homicides in wealthier neighbourhoods than in poorer ones (Dorling, 2008).

THE REALITY OF VIOLENCE

Though acts of violence against strangers tend to receive greater media coverage, partly because they are rarer and their randomness can make them appear more frightening, violence is predominantly associated with relationship difficulties, whether between a man and wife, two or more friends or a group of adults or young people.

This also applies to violence between nations and races. For nearly two thousand years, the Jews, as a stateless people, had to sustain their own culture while being accepted within the cultures of which they were a part. Biculturalism always gives people social advantages by virtue of the wider range of social skills they have to learn (Heller, 1987) but it carries with it the danger of envy. Those races with whom the Jews had the closest relationships were most likely to appreciate the social advantages the Jews had and, if for any reason those races had suffered a loss of self-esteem, it would be just as tempting to them as to a child in a playground to want to do something to change that situation.

Most ethnic cleansing and genocide has taken place between nations or races which were in close proximity with each other and often had long-standing relationships. Indiscriminate violence between nations who have not been in close contact for some time is relatively rare. If violence was 'hard-wired' into human beings, we would expect the amount of violence to be relatively similar between acquaintances and between strangers but that is far from being the case.

THE CENTRALITY OF RELATIONSHIPS

We cannot exist as human beings without relationships and we describe those people who appear to be able to do so or seek to do so as 'seriously mentally ill.' Everything we do is affected by a current or past relationship; even when we are doing something on our own, our capacity to do this derives from what happened in one or more previous relationships. But for the most part what we do is done in association, if not in cooperation, with other people and what influences us most are the relationships and interactions that surround us as we do something.

But what if something goes wrong in a relationship or an interaction that prevents us from achieving what we want to do? We can look for another relationship; we can try to change the relationship we have or the nature of

the interactions; we can withdraw from the relationship or interaction for the time being. Among the factors which will affect our choice are the *rapport* we want if we are women or the *status* we are seeking if we are men (Tannen, 1992) .

However, if people reject, or do not have the time to explore or the life experience to envisage, these alternatives, they may turn to violence in the hope of achieving what they want. For example, both domestic violence and genocide can occur because one party believes the other is failing to afford them the *status* to which they believe they are entitled. Domestic violence often occurs because one party seeks to deny another a *relationship* to which they believe they are entitled. Both domestic violence and genocide can occur because one party is jealous that the other has access to a *relationship* to which they do not have access.

But relationships are not made overnight nor are they sustained once they are made without continuing inputs of affiliation and nurturance, among other things (Weiss, 1986). If we become oppressed by the circumstances that surround us, we can fail to put the effort into sustaining relationships and those who fail to receive inputs from us often give up providing inputs for us. So we can end up in downward spiral of reducing *time* and *agape* from others as many of those who have fallen on hard times have found.

Of course, strictly speaking, our Christian friends should not cease their expressions of *agape* towards us but it is more difficult to express *agape* to someone with whom we do not have a relationship (Cole, 1998). So, if neither party puts the effort into sustaining a relationship, both parties can gradually become indifferent to it and the strength of emotions towards the other party can decline. With that decline comes less inclination to love or to hate because we no longer *care about* them. We can then become indifferent to whether or not we are perpetrating violence towards them, whether emotional or physical.

But the relationships we choose to make and sustain, and the ones about which we normally have the strongest emotions, are inherently asymmetrical; each party offers the other something they do not have. So, for example, we often make close relationships with someone we admire because they have qualities we aspire to or with someone for whom we have affection because we can nurture them. As long as each wishes, and is able, to offer what the other wants, the relationship can be sustained.

However, if the asymmetry becomes too great, the inequality may induce strong emotions of desire or envy which neither party can cope with. Though the other does not become objectified as in indifference, the other may become distant and therefore less of a person with whom we can identify any longer or, if the other chooses not to sustain the relationship, the emotions of desire to sustain the relationship may become emotions of hate at the abandonment.

Alternatively, the asymmetry may disappear, reducing the desire on the part of one party for what the other can offer and denying the other the pleasure, often of affection, that had sustained the relationship hitherto. Michael Faraday, for example, outgrew what Humphrey Davy could offer him and, though Michael Faraday always showed his love for his mentor, Davy became jealous of his former protégé (Bragg, 2006).

THE CROSS AND RELATIONSHIPS

As I have already said, the Cross is an act both of *agape* and of *time*. It both models for us and embraces us in the highest expression of love. But, as sinners, many people fail to accept its fullness because they cannot believe that God would love sinners like them to that extent and, in failing to accept the fullness of God's love, they fail to allow His grace to flow into them and to infuse the relationships they have with other people with love. They can become fearful or jealous of love and, in so doing, create situations in which violence may become a response.

As an act of *time* the Cross gives people a status unimaginable in any other religion. But if, for a variety of reasons, people lack self-esteem, they find it extremely difficult to accept this gift of *time*. Some, indeed, make a 'virtue' of their unworthiness, calling attention to it all the time, rather than accepting the fullness of God's grace and recognising that, through Christ's sacrifice, God has made them worthy citizens of His Kingdom, not because they have gained worthiness through their own actions but because God has granted them worthiness through the Cross.

Time is inextricably bound up with *agape* because those who do not have a sense of their own worthiness cannot express love in all its fullness. Our Lord, quoting Leviticus 19:18, bids us to love our neighbour as ourselves. If we cannot fully love ourselves because our own sense of unworthiness prevents us from fully loving ourselves, we cannot offer God or our neighbours the fullness of love. We also become vulnerable to outbursts of physical or emotional violence arising from the emotions which

relationships can engender or to careless violence because our sense of unworthiness leads us to devalue our relationships.

Among the reasons why people fail to accept the fullness of God's grace as expressed in the Cross is that the process of moving from the 'original sin' of seeing oneself as the centre of the universe to seeing oneself as existing in and through the relationships which we make with God and with our neighbours consists in a series of stages during which we undergo *metanoiai*, or changes in the way we view the world, one of which is the decisive act of repentance which leads to our redemption but others of which are part of our growing awareness of what it means to be a Christian and our growing willingness to accept the fullness of God's grace in our lives. Those who are prepared to make this journey increasingly come to experience the peace that the Cross brings; those who are not or become stuck on the journey are unable to experience the peace of the Cross in all its fullness.

THE CROSS AND PEACE IN CRIMINAL JUSTICE

All offenders suffer from a shortage of *time* or of *agape* or of both in their lives; all victims suffer from some loss of *time* and some may lose the *agape* of others as a result of the offence. Most secular theories of justice depend on further reducing the offender's *time* and, in many cases, their capacity to give and receive *agape*; most criminal justice systems offer victims little *time* and some of the processes that victims are required to endure 'in the interests of justice' further reduce their sense of worthiness; none of them bring peace to either victim or offender.

The peace of the Cross is available to both victim and offender through the experience of reconciliation. The act of forgiveness on the part of the victim is an acknowledgement of the worthiness of the offender to receive forgiveness; before the offender can repent, the offender also has to forgive those who have offended against them. I had never really understood the parable of the unforgiving servant, and in particular Matthew 18:34, until I met those offenders who had not been able to bring themselves to forgive those who had offended against them. The sufferings they brought on themselves through their unwillingness to forgive were far more terrible than the sufferings any other victims had ever shared with me and I realised that the punishments the unforgiving servant experienced were self-inflicted. In refusing to give *time* or *agape* to another, he erected a barrier to receiving them from anyone else.

Out of the act of forgiveness to others, the offender gains a sense of worthiness that is a precursor to their own repentance. This statement may surprise Christians who are used to associating repentance with abasement, with feelings of unworthiness and with throwing themselves on the mercy of the Lord. But therein lies one of the many paradoxes of the Cross. Those who find it difficult to forgive and those who find it difficult to repent are trapped in a spiral of fear in which they have convinced themselves that doing either is a sign of 'weakness' which will bring further unworthiness on them.

In practice, the acts of forgiveness and repentance, certainly for serious offenders, come long after they have been through 'valley of the shadow' or the deep depression that precedes their acknowledgement of their responsibility for their offending which is in turn the necessary condition for forgiveness and repentance. In the act of forgiveness the offender demonstrates his/her recognition of the worthiness of those who have offended against her/him and his/her love for them and in so doing opens up the possibility of recognising that God considered her/him worthy of love.

Christian offenders are often deeply troubled at how they came to be in the situation of committing their offences; for them, the process of forgiving those who have offended against them reawakens their earlier understanding of the meaning of the Cross and creates the opportunity for them of experiencing anew, and often with a deeper understanding, the *time* and *agape* that God offers to them.

The act of forgiveness on the part of the victim reinforces the offender's worthiness because there is no point in forgiving someone who is not responsible for what they have done. Treating offenders as responsible people is a recognition of their worthiness. The love which is inherent in forgiveness opens up the possibility for both victim and offender of renewing certain relationships which had been inhibited by the victim's former sense of unworthiness and by the offender's failure to manage relationships in the past.

The new relationship that emerges from a reconciliation between victim and offender brings the *shalom*, or peace, of justice (Marshall, 2001) to the relationship. The Cross exemplifies the *shalom* of justice by demonstrating God bringing both *agape* and *time* to His relationship with humankind. The act of reconciliation as part of the *shalom* of justice brings both *time* and *agape* to both victim and offender out of which both can have new lives.

VIOLENCE AS SYMPTOM, NOT CAUSE

Violence always occurs in the absence of *time* or *agape* or both which inhibits the capacity for *shalom* in relationships. It is always, as at Abu Grahb, a consequence of what is going on in a relationship or interaction, not a cause. Reifying violence as a genetic disposition or a 'drive' is as unhelpful as punishing those who have committed violence without taking any action to address the relationships or interactions which created the situation in which love, hate or indifference led to violence.

The violence of the Cross, a response to a message which people were unwilling to accept whether because of the emotions it raised in them or their indifference to it, opened the way to the end of violence by becoming a demonstration of God's supreme *agape* and *time* towards His people and thus of the way to bring the *shalom* of justice to all our relationships. But in a world in which many people, including some who call themselves Christians, find it difficult to accept the fullness of God's grace expressed in the Cross, there will always be relationships which do not express that fullness and therefore become open to expressions of violence as symptoms of their limitations.

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