

WEST BELFAST APRIL 1981 – ANALYSIS

A short analysis of the situation in West Belfast, making use of the work of Rene' Girard. (First version).

1. We have the impression, that culture in West Belfast, or in any case in certain parts of West Belfast is vanishing. The ties between the families and even in the families are getting looser or are disappearing. Interest for issues, going further than immediate needs and immediate joys can hardly be found. Law and morals are losing their relevance.

Society and culture in West Belfast was long kept in order by the means on which all society in the end is resting: on myth. Rites and laws. The institute which guaranteed in fact these three was the Roman Catholic Church, with the state as a in a sense foreign, far away meta-institute.

2. In fact everyone, every institution is trying to keep and get things in order. The church doing her traditional things, myth, rites, law, loosing contact more and more with what in fact is happening. The state, trying to enforce law, mostly deeply disgusted by the population, which too hates the myth and the rites behind that what it feels as violence. The IRA trying to enforce its law, with possibly widely accepted myths and rites, and in the same time so openly violence as a force of order so ambiguous in its position, that it achieves little or nothing. The population, trying now and then to “organize” a “sacrificial chaos”, knowing “deep down”, that only out of chaos can come peace.
3. Everything which is done seems doomed to be of no interest. West Belfast, although living in its own world, is not any longer a world if its own. The influences, coming from outside by various channels, will go on to destroy the communities and the participants in them. The situation can be compared with many others in the whole world, where the possessors of old cultures are driven out of them, mostly becoming people, living on the edge in every sense of the word. Things being and staying as they are, there is not any hope for the population of West Belfast.
4. Which are the possibilities to change what is happening?
 - (a) West Belfast is brought back to her own, old culture. There are many causes, which make this wholly impossible.
 - (b) West Belfast is integrated in the wider culture, which surrounds her. If we see the situation of this situation of this culture and the position West Belfast is being in, it is very improbable, that there is, in a foreseeable future, any chance of succeeding in this manner.
 - (c) A possibility would be a group, giving new myths, rites and laws to people, living the chaos. In fact in a sense it would be a repetition of the coming into existence of culture. There is chaos. All, not belonging to the (new) group in fact are driven out (until they wish to become a member of the group) there is, in the new group, peace, in which myth, rites and law fulfil their role. In fact it is the way of sects in disintegrated societies.

- (d) Maybe it would be possible to begin to build up in West Belfast small groups, in which a new culture begins. A culture, not built on mimesis, in fact the culture shown in the gospels and in the beginning of the church, as described in Acts. In church history, St. Franciscus is an example. The have-nots, living in West Belfast, of whom Jesus speaks in the beginning of Matthew ch.5, could be the bearers of this new culture.
5. Is there a possibility for the Roman Catholic Church? It would be of the biggest interest if there were!
- (a) If the church stays entangled in the whole of society, which surrounds West Belfast, if the church stays partaking in the power struggle which is going on, trying to have its power on big and on very small scale, if the servants of the church stay partaking in it, for the sake of the church or for their own sake, in that case the possibilities of the church are very small. It will, in the end, disappear with the culture to which it belongs.
- (b) If the church is prepared to live with the people, belonging to them, only living together with and for them, it might be that there are possibilities. If the church is interested, it is necessary, further to reflect on the possibilities and the conditions.