

Building the Fabric of Peace: Jane Addams and Peaceweaving

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Abstract:

Jane Addams (1860- 1935) is noted for her leadership in the social settlement movement and her peace activism. Addams drew upon lessons from Christ and the early Christians to develop her ideas of peace. This article examines Addams feminist notion of an active, positive peace (peace weaving) through the lenses of key bible verses with themes including, love your neighbor, love your enemy, care for children and forgive.

Key Words: peace, Jane Addams, sympathetic understanding, lateral progress, social justice,

February 25, 2015

Thank you very much for this opportunity. When I first mentioned the idea of a sermon series on Peace to Pastor Brad I didn't anticipate I would be up here sharing my ideas with the congregation. That was a surprise, a good surprise I suppose. I will start this investigation into Jane Addams's "peaceweaving" with four well-known Bible verses that are woven throughout the entire presentation. The first "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31). Second, "Love your enemies and pray for them" (Matthew 5:44). Third, "Let the little children come to me" (Matthew 19:4). Finally, "And when you start praying, if you hold anything against anyone forgive him" (Mark 11:25).

Background

And now a little bit of the backstory of how I came to study peace. This all started by a request from the Swedish Defense College. They contracted me to write a conference

paper dealing with the “expeditionary mindset and core values” (Shields, 2011). Well it turns out Sweden, the Netherlands, Norway, lots of countries in Europe; their militaries are deeply involved in peacekeeping operations (PKO). Ideally, these multinational forces act as neutral umpires that often begin their task as a cease-fire begins and the situation is still filled with unpredictable violence. Their goal is to transform the warlike situation into a working, functional, peaceful society. Throughout the course of the peacekeeping operation the multinational military force is responsible for a lot of this. At the front end it is really helpful to have a warrior mindset. The warrior mindset, however, can be problematic, as the peacekeeping operation moves into stabilization and the task of creating institutions, which sustain a peaceful society. Warriors think friend/enemy, victory/defeat, and war/peace. It is pretty black and white and it needs to be during a traditional warrior mission. But when a society is moving toward stability and peace, the warrior mindset can lead to operational missteps (Broesder, den Buijs, Vogelaar, & Euwema, 2015, Kummel & Furst, 2011).

The conference I attended was a way to bring scholars together as a way to think about these issues and perhaps figure out what kind of mindset military forces engaged in this kind of activity should use. I enjoyed the conference and continued to believe we grappled with an important and intriguing question. When it was time for my sabbatical, the spring of 2014, I decided to work on something related to this problem. I had already studied the ideas of Jane Addams in another context. I knew that she had written a lot on peace, which I hadn’t explored. Why not explore her ideas in the context of peacekeeping operations? Texas State agreed and so during the Spring Semester of 2014 I spent a lot of time reading her material and reading the peace and peacekeeping literature. I teamed up with a colleague, Joseph Soeters, from the Netherlands Defense academy who has done extensive fieldwork in peace operations including Lebanon, Bosnia, Kosovo, DR Congo and Liberia, (Shields & Soeters, 2013, 2015).

We eventually submitted a manuscript on “Peaceweaving” to a journal. While writing this article it dawned on me that the concept of peace was rich and diverse enough that it would make a great sermon series. I approached Pastor Brad and here I am talking to you sharing my ideas.

Who was Jane Addams

Laura Jane Addams was born in Cedarville Illinois to a wealthy family, shortly before the Civil War (1860). She died in 1935 in her beloved Chicago. She was the first woman in the United States to win the Nobel Peace Prize. Beginning in her late 20s and for the rest of her life she was involved in the “settlement movement”. She established a social settlement during the late 1880s a period characterized by large-scale immigration, urbanization and industrialization. Citizens of the US moved from the farm to the city and newly arriving immigrants flooded the streets and new factories of America’s big cities. There were also a lot of problems in the cities. The Settlement movement was thus a way to try to deal with the problems of urbanization and industrialization. Addams and her friend Ellen Gates Starr established a settlement home in Chicago named Hull House. The best I can describe it as a huge, residential community center that worked with the community to bring about changes. And, Chicago needed serious change. For example, what did the kids play on sometimes – horse carcasses. Now I guess it would not be healthy to have your kids around the bodies of dead horses (Davis, 2000; Farrell, 1967).

Between 1840 and 1890 Chicago grew from a small town of 4500 to over a million. By the time Addams arrived (1887) almost 80% of its residents were immigrants or their US born children (Knight, 2010, p. 66). This rapid growth and concentrated industrialism left the city with lots of problems. These immigrants mostly came from Europe and they brought with them their hostilities from different countries. There were religious hostilities. There were just centuries of those countries fighting. The immigrant slums of the 1890s Chicago was filled with opportunities to “love your neighbor” and “love your

enemy”.

The “settlement was an experimental efforts to aid in the solutions of the problems engendered of modern conditions in a great cities” (Addams, 1960/1910, p.98). Remember the modern condition included streets with horse carcasses. She considered the immigrant neighborhoods around Hull House as a kind of interactive laboratory to understand conflict and conflict resolution. Her ideas of peace grew out of her work in the settlement movement.

She was an outspoken progressive reformer with a long and successful agenda. Children were a special focus. She and the mostly women residents of Hull House worked for child labor laws, the establishment of separate juvenile courts, playgrounds, better schools and (in response to high infant mortality rates) improved sanitation (garbage collection, water and sewer) (Addams, 1960/1910). Hull house also had services like a kindergarten, drama classes, concerts and day care. She was engaged as a mediator during strikes and worked for healthier, safer working conditions particularly for women who worked in the garment industry. There was another immigration that came up from the South. African-Americans moved North seeking jobs and less racism. She worked closely with Black leaders and actually was a founder of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (Davis, 2000; Farrell, 1967).

Addams was also a Christian. When she and Ellen Gates Starr moved to Chicago, the first thing they did was to contact local churches and get the support among the local ministers and church leaders (Davis, 2000). Her Christology “focused on the life and teachings of Jesus, Jewish prophets, and other humans (such as Tolstoy and Gandhi) who called for a just, nurturing and peaceful world” (Stebner, 2010, 203). Her Christianity was an impulse to “share the lives of the poor in a way the Good Shepherd would have us do” (Elshtaine, 2002, p. 96). Jesus offered a call to action, which she embraced. Hull House was modeled on the community life of the early Christians.

She wrote 11 books, most of which I read during my sabbatical semester. She fought for women and was particularly interested in expanding the woman's sphere beyond the narrow confines of the home. She thought the home and caring fine but that women shouldn't be restricted to the home. Moreover, if a daughter or mother really wanted to care for her family she might have to work for progressive reform like better garbage collection and sanitation. Addams is also credited with a key leadership role in initiating the women's peace movement (Addams, Balch & Hamilton, 2003/1915; Hamington, 2009; Davis, 2000).

She was a peace activist who wrote books on peace and initiated women's peace organizations. During World War I, before the US entered World War I, she organized and led a women's peace conference at The Hague and after that traveled around Europe talking to leaders in the belligerent countries trying to get them to mediate the conflict. These activities moved her to the world stage and led to her Nobel Peace Prize.

Contemporary Peace Literature

Let me detour a moment to the peace literature. There was one article that just stuck in my mind. Here's the title "Peace Research: Just the Study of War" (Gleditsch, Nordkvelle, & Strand, 2014). What does this mean? It has to do with how scholars define peace. Peace has been defined in two ways. One is a negative notion of peace, which is the absence of war. The second is called "positive peace," which incorporates what a peaceful society might look like (Galtung, 1969). It turns out peace researchers have been using the negative definition of peace almost exclusively. By focusing on peace as the absence of war, peace scholars had inadvertently focused on war. Well that seemed crazy to me. It also placed Jane Addams ideas into the realm of positive peace, a topic that had been neglected. It seemed obvious we needed a richer, deeper more wonderful sense of positive peace. This article crystalized for me where Jane Addams ideas fit in a larger scheme and it demonstrated the

need for work on positive peace.

Her Ideas of Peace

Now I want to focus on her key ideas of peace. First, of all she focuses on relationships. Violent conflict is a broken relationship. Peace is a loving, working, caring, relationship. It embodies the key Christian message I began with, “love your neighbor,” “love your enemy” and “forgive.” Every single one of these bible verses speaks to a relationship.

Second, she identified something that makes forming and establishing good relationships almost impossible. She identified a fixed mindset or rigid moralism as problematic. When people adopt rigid moralism and a fixed mindset, real listening just does not happen. Relationships involve listening.

Third, she stressed the importance of “sympathetic understanding,” one of her lynchpin concepts. What does it mean to “love your neighbor” or “love your enemy”? What does it actually mean? How do you do that? Well, sympathetic understanding kind of answers these questions. It says let's put oneself in the eyes or mind, or sense of the other person. Walk in their shoes. Sympathetic understanding encompasses openness and a willingness to listen, to suspend judgment (Hamington, 2009). It is just the opposite of rigid dogmatism. Kindness is another aspect of sympathetic understanding. You think about walking in someone else's shoes but with a sense of kindness. Also I think it involves a willingness to forgive. Forgiveness is part of “loving your neighbor,” “loving your enemies,” for sure.

Addams also recognized that sympathetic understanding could actually take courage. How could this take courage? Well if you are part of a group that has a pretty strong rigid mindset and part of that rigid mindset is that the other guy is the enemy or evil, it could be considered a betrayal to open your heart and *see* life as the ‘other’ experiences it. How can I bring sympathetic understanding, or consider walking in the other

person's shoes, and not risk alienating friends and allies. This behavior can be viewed as moving over to the enemy. So, "loving your neighbor" and "loving your enemy" is or can be an act of courage. Note, she never suggests that one should adopt the belief system of an adversary, rather have a willingness to listen with empathy.

Fourth, she brought up the "community of inquiry." In a way this is answering the question, "Where do I learn to love my neighbor or my enemy?" The community of inquiry opens up space so that people can build relationships. How do we build relationships? We don't build them taking on the persona that "I know what is right and the other side is wrong". Or, "my goal is to convert my opponent to my 'right' position, or else" (Shields, 2003).

Rather, the community of inquiry is about finding and working on shared practical problems, which is the first component of the community of inquiry. Shared problem solving presents an opportunity to transcend ideological divides. Next, problems are approached by something like a scientific attitude. Basically this means a commitment to objectivity. This does not mean objectivity is ever really achieved; rather that objectivity is a shared goal, which translates into looking at evidence.

The final component of the community of inquiry is called participatory democracy and here is where everyone who is concerned about the problem should have a voice (Addams, 2002a/1902). They should listen and be listened to. This included the voices of immigrants and disenfranchised women. She called for us to cast a wide net, as we "loved our neighbor." Oftentimes experts are called in to solve problems. They have the answers; the people listen. Now experts are important for sure. But for the community of inquiry to play out we should consider the metaphor of the shoemaker and the shoe. The shoemaker is an expert at making shoes but the wearer knows where it pinches. So both are necessary for the community of inquiry to function (Elshtain, 2002; Knight, 2005; Shields, 2006).

The fifth key concept that captures Addams ideas of peace is “lateral progress”, which means progress or perhaps success is measured by how well the people at the bottom of the socioeconomic sphere are doing (Hamington, 2009). Here is where Christ’s “let the children come to me” pours fourth. Lateral progress is about the welfare of the vulnerable and who are more vulnerable than children. But of course Jesus was radical because he also taught us to care for other vulnerable groups like women, the sick and the poor. And when we think about the action and message of Jesus, his focus was right there. He healed the sick and cared for the outcast. Addams clearly included the disenfranchised women of the early 20th century, who were limited in their access to education and bound by a paternalistic laws and culture, as among the vulnerable and voiceless.

The Civic Household

For peace to flourish, Addams recognized that the governmental setting should be taken into account. In her first book on peace (*Newer Ideals of Peace*) she examined how contemporary models of city government undermine peace (Addams, 2007/1907). Specifically, she found remnants of a militaristic past imbedded in early 20th century city government. She traced this problem to early conceptions of a city, which was responsible to protect its elite masters and the people who served them from invaders. This brought with it undemocratic assumptions and a disregard for the welfare of the vulnerable. In addition, soldiers, who were always men, had an elevated position (Fischer, 2009).

Obviously, dictators no longer ruled the cities of the late 20th century. Neither did these cities need the protection of soldiers. Yet they retained governance practices of an earlier time. She pointed to the actions of police, the treatment of immigrants (like the enemy) and exclusion of women as examples (Addams, 2007/1907).

She advocated a new model, which conceptualized the city as a household, and governance as civic housekeeping. Effective households incorporate an ethics of care and are the domain of women. Households care about children, safety, and the welfare of elderly. The household is also the domain of women (Addams 1913). We should organize cities in a way that we can create the spaces to do this. The metaphorical civic household was a caring space. It could be a caring place to “love your neighbor” and to learn how to “love your enemy.” It was a place to care for children, welcome immigrants and include the wisdom of women’s experience. It was a space where peace could grow.

These ideas of peace, including relationships, sympathetic understanding, community of inquiry and lateral progress, all started with her experiences in the neighborhoods of Chicago. They moved out from there to the city, to the nation and eventually to the world.

Let us see how she and the Women at The Hague applied some of these ideas during 1915 at The Hague peace conference. I have three examples. The Women at The Hague issued a set of resolutions. An underlying theme of many of these resolutions was that legal and cultural restrictions on women should be overturned. Women should be free to contribute and be engaged in the world outside the home. All women should have the right to vote, participate in politics and to participate in international processes to create peace (Resolutions 2, 8, 9, 15 & 17) (Addams, Balch & Hamilton, 2003/1915 pp. 123-129). Second, resolutions stressed that once the war ended; peace should include sympathetic understanding towards the enemy (Resolutions, 3 & 5) (Addams, Balch & Hamilton, 2003/1915, p124-125). In other words it was important to remember to “love our enemies” and “forgive.” It would be disastrous to bring a rigid, moralistic sense of victory and vanquished to the peace table. Unfortunately that is exactly what happened after World War I. Most historians have concluded that the Versailles Peace Treaty sowed the seeds of the Second World War. And third, after the war there was great

starvation throughout Europe concentrated within Germany and her allies (Addams, 2002b/1922). Addams joined Herbert Hoover who led a huge humanitarian intervention to stave off starvation and feed the hungry children of Europe – “love your enemies” and care for children.

Peaceweaving

So, *peaceweaving*, a term coined by Joseph Soeters and myself to summarize Addams’s notion of peace; what does it mean? We see peaceweaving as a way to build the fabric of peace by “*emphasizing relationships. These positive relationships are built by working on practical problems, engaging people widely with sympathetic understanding, while recognizing that progress is measured by the welfare of vulnerable*” (Shields & Soeters, 2015, p.). “Love your neighbor”, “love your enemy” care for children, and forgive.

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Biographical Sketch

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