

Q: HOW DEFEAT PIOUS VICTIMIZISM ?

A: BY A PARADIGM SHIFT

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Today, in deep distress & even deeper disgust, a leading thinker in the United Church of Christ asked me how to respond lovingly & effectively to "**poor me/us**" politics in our church, the Church, & the general society.

1 This plague, increasing steadily since the legislative successes of the black movement in the latter half of the '60s, is an under-table power play, counter to the on-table power plays of whatever "establishment" or "system" the under-players are striving to defeat. My first point: The psychological dynamics and spiritual effects of the two power-plays are identical. The moral & ethical implications of the two are problematic. And the legal bearings, indeterminate.

2 By "pious victims," I mean those who proudly imagine that they have gained & are holding the **high moral ground** above "advantaged" groups in church & society, & in their pride are undefended against hubris, the excessive claims of those who've permitted their "basal incurvature" to deceive them. (Luther's definition of sin as "Incurvatus sum," "I curve back in on myself." The quote is from Gabriel Fackre [p.58, THE PROMISE OF REINHOLD NEIBUHR: Revised Edition, University Press of America / 94] in describing R.N.'s view of sin as "the placing of the self [or group] at the center of its universe and thus displacing the only One who belongs there." Pride only secondarily as "the sin of the powerful": primarily as "a universal self-regarding tendency," which is [p.8] "original sin.")

3 Currently, the social form of "basal incurvature" is **tribalization**. In this neo-sense, gays are a tribe & bisexuals a subtribe, women are a tribe with lesbians as a subtribe & female bisexuals as a subsubtribe. (Well, aren't men a tribe? Not yet, anyway. We don't have any "poor-us" movement going strong enough to claim tribal status.)

4 The two roots of the pious-victim power play are:

**biblical religion**, which liberationists cook into this dubious syllogism:

God is partial to (has a "preferential option" for) "the poor."

Because we are victims, we qualify for the "poor" category.

Therefore, God is on our side against "them," the "oppressors."

**secular-political egalitarianism:**

"All men [i.e., people] are created equal" to one another.

(A humanistic misreading of Jefferson, who meant only "equal" face-to-face with God & government.)

All cultures are of inherent equal value & should be given equal treatment in society, including in public education. Called **multiculturalism**.

All religions are in (Langdon Gilkey) "rough parity." Called **pluralism**.

All claims of superiority are hierarchical, vertical, antiegalitarian, evil.

5 Now suppose we execute a **paradigm shift** from all the above to **win/lose**, a powerful American category, for which a common American metaphor is **top/under dog**. As a Jewish joke puts it, "I have been poor & I have been rich. Rich is better." Topdog is better. Topdog is "superior" (Latin, meaning on top). Fact: Some folks are winners, others losers. Interesting feedback I got when in the UNITED CHURCH NEWS I said, anent anti-Columbus Columbus Day Amerind powwows, "I've no objection to losers' demonstrations." The word underlined here (not in the publication) was a wrenching paradigm-shift! **I refuse to be victimized by pious victimizers**. Instead of moving me to repentance, they tempt me to pride.

6 All my superiorities (i.e., topdog statuses) are, in light of the glorious gospel of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, "**rubbish**" (Philippians 3:8). Yours, too. Including any more-victimized-than-thou accusation you may lodge against me. We need another game than oppressor/victim or win/lose. Maybe to get beyond games.