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# Innocent Perpetrators or Guilty Victims? The Modern Victim Cult vs. the Sacrifice of Christ

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by Zsolt Szabó

One of the central concepts in the domain of religion and belief, the victim, seems to be an increasingly important topic in secular public life today, albeit in a different context. In a recent issue of a Hungarian political science journal *Politikatudományi Szemle (Political Science Review)*, it can be read, “While in the heroic age the collective imagination of the West was populated by heroes from Heracles to James Bond, from the

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Crusaders to the '56 Hungarian freedom fighter, today we cultivate a cult of victims and casualties ranging from domestic violence to climate catastrophes, from the 1944 German occupation to metoo.”<sup>1</sup>

What is to be discussed below is what psychology calls *victim mentality*. The strategy we are talking about can be applied individually or by a community alike, in any sphere of public or private life, by which the subject keeps the adversary in check by hiding behind the mask of the victim. The symptoms are as follows: blaming others; over-emphasizing external factors over internal ones; envisioning conspiracies, coercion, manipulation, the phantasm of the lack of freedom of choice; emotionally burdening the social environment with suffering; and at the same time demanding understanding and empathy. It is the opposition of the poor victim “I” and the evil perpetrator “they.” Such a self-appointed victim is, in fact, often an aggressor who expects others to be ashamed of their different way of thinking. This usually manifests in passive aggression, but unfortunately, as we have seen in the BLM “movement,” affairs and incidents do not always stop there and can turn into active ones.

The high-impact, militant identity movements which address public life—like MeToo, BLM, or Love is Love—all share a common feature in that they all seem to envisage the liberation of victims,

the advent of justice and catharsis. Below the surface, however, these movements also tune people against all perceived or real enemies. They pledge to eradicate stigmas while latently labelling with stigmas themselves. They oppose generalizations and contest roles that are claimed to have been surpassed, all the while generalizing and shaming others. Pampering grievances, they smear those whom they designate as perpetrators, making them scapegoats. In this narrative weakness turned into might, the pathetic became the heroic. The envy of

them, ... goes against not only common sense but also scientific norms.”

I would like to point out that I am no better than those who stigmatize others if I stigmatize them in the same way. Denying or contesting MeToo, which has now turned into a campaign, is no less damaging than the MeToo movement itself. The tempers that flare for and against pride campaigns are often exactly the same, except that one carries a positive sign, and the other carries a negative sign. Politics aims to reinforce outbreaks

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the heroes is replaced by the pity for the victims. The victim formerly hiding his or her suffering and seeking support covertly in his or her family and social relationships has now become a freedom fighter appealing to the public.

The victim card can be played in individual games (abuse card for divorce disputes, minority card for police action, discrimination card for work-related issues) as well as at the community and social level. Whether someone honestly considers himself or herself a victim or consciously leverages this card as a power play makes little difference. The two are equally dangerous. Just like racism or abuse, it can be either deliberate or unintended, and it can remain unnoticed even to the one committing the act, who might unconsciously follow a behavioural pattern. Admittedly, when a self-appointed victim calls out abuse, racism, or homophobia, the claim may indeed turn out to be true.

However, that may not always and doubtlessly be the case. In particular, such accusations would be, in all likelihood, overruled in court in most cases. Gergely Szilvay aptly writes about this in the May 27, 2021 issue of the Hungarian *Mandiner* magazine: “These days one need not go to great lengths to identify victims[:] they will come out themselves.[...] However recognizing incidents and personal stories without factual evidence, just because alleged victims reported having experienced

and keep the flames of rage and hatred high. Since I am not a politician, my goal is different.

So how do we know which party's ambitions are justified and whose emotion is harmful? The actual question is not who is on which side, but what the driving force happens to be: hate or love. According to Christianity, the everlasting opposition is in fact formed by these former two, not the right-left, the conservative-liberal, or the traditional-progressive dichotomy. My goal now is simply to present the phenomenon of the victim cult, hopefully managing to avoid the clichés of the typical “the other is wrong” argument along the way.

The victim mentality is just as devastating as racism, abusive relationships, or homophobia, but there is less talk about it, because it is more difficult to recognize and to pinpoint. A well-proven way to stifle the necessary and meaningful talk about this issue is to put a “victim-blaming” label on those who would do just as much as to raise the issue at all. Accordingly, anyone who ventures to speak about the exploitation of the victim position, about how some use it to manipulate others, is to be considered an insensitive, politically incorrect person, or worse, a downright accomplice. Clearly, it is a taboo, a stage in the struggle to keep public life topical, according to which reviewing the victim's involvement or veracity is categorically out of the question in public discourse. Blaming the victim

instead of the perpetrator is, of course, to be condemned, but my topic now is not the perpetrators who blame the victim but those who are disguised as the victim.

It is of particular concern when the defining feature of a community's identity is primarily, or even exclusively, victimhood. I write these lines as a Christian, so as an outsider, but I run the risk of saying that it is not right for Jews to nurture the pain of the Holocaust as their main characteristic, instead of the thousands of years of rich culture in which the whole Western world is rooted and their exalted sense of being chosen by the Almighty. The fury of the perceived or real victimhood preserves the conflict, breeding more and more aggression.

Of course, homophobia, racism, and sexism must be rejected—*ohne wenn und aber* (no ifs and buts). The problem with the victim mentality is that even such acts get labelled with these words, which have nothing to do with them. The exercise of freedom of choice and expression is not homophobia, racism, or sexism, and consequently it is not the cause of anybody's suffering. If I am consciously looking for a partner of the opposite sex or a friend of the same skin color as mine, it is not due to my being hidebound or having a conservative attitude: I am simply exercising my freedom of choice. Supporting, embracing heterosexual identity, or even considering it preferable, is not equal to homophobia. Accepting and supporting homo-identity is not progress or progression in itself, but only what it is: a subjective choice of value. The recent decision by the Finnish prosecutor to sacrifice freedom of speech on the altar of the cult of victimhood is astonishing: the former Minister of Home Affairs has to stand trial because he quoted from the Bible in connection with Pride.

It is a shame for humanity that there are abused women. This must be stated; it must be said. On the other hand, it must be on the table, too, that there are women who abuse the gullibility of others and claim molestation when it is in their interest, even if nothing of the sort has happened. Moreover, there are men who are abused by women. A relatively recent scientific study<sup>2</sup> in Hungary is available on this topic. The press covers the issue in a less heavy manner, both in print and in online articles.

Unquestionably, domestic violence is a blatant sin, and it is undeniable that the majority of its victims are women. Nonetheless, it is also clear that there are exploitative people who see in this label a handy opportunity to pursue their own personal goals. Some are bellowing about being persecuted in order to compensate for something they have not gotten in their lives.

Some say LGBTQ people still face a lot of discrimination. But what is the reality of this sympathetic statement? Legal discrimination is properly sanctioned by our Hungarian legal system. Is it discriminatory that they, per definition, cannot marry and cannot adopt a child together? The question then arises: is there a fundamental right to marriage or adoption? From a legal point of view, there is none, even if many would rejoice in it. If there were such a right, lonely people could apply for a spouse from the State Marriage Office. Childless people could demand a foster child from the Wardship Authority on the basis of this right. It is time to face it: In Hungary the concept of marriage used to be, and is still today, not some elusive construct, but the concrete and exclusive union of one man and one woman. It is not mandatory to live in a marriage—anyone is free to decide whether they wish to opt into it or not. Similarly, neither must same-sex parenting be called a family. Let us summon up the courage to raise our voice: Someone who complains that he or she cannot freely shape the concepts of language and re-define common sense is not a victim but an aggressor.

Allow me to quote from a U.S. embassy statement issued on the occasion of The International Day against Homophobia 2020 (May 17th):

“Human rights are universal and LGBTQ people are entitled to the same respect, freedom and protection as everyone else.”

If there had been offered a chance, I would have put my signature below this sentence. They are to be treated with equal respect, not more. This is evident, a statement that is beyond dispute. But let us be clear: neither marriage nor family follow from this. It is the same phenomenon once again: portraying themselves as victims, a group tries to put pressure on public opinion to rewrite a concept according to their own ideas. The rejection of this

attempt at subjugation is by no means equivalent to homophobia. Free choice presupposes, for example, that parents have the opportunity to look for a kindergarten or school where there is no mention of alternative sexes or homosexuality, *horribile dictu* (horrible to say), an institution which considers traditional gender roles to be the norm.

What is next? Are paedophiles, bigamists, or people committing incest to be called victims who

his or her gender identity. This proposal concerns many areas of life, from housing to employment and obtaining a loan or mortgage to the operation of juries, leading to another state intervention in the sphere of private life, property, and religious freedom. The law would also prohibit restricting the use of gender-segregated rooms (toilets, changing rooms) so that those who would rather not choose their gender by birth could use the one appropriate

## What is next? Are paedophiles, bigamists, or people committing incest to be called victims who need to be “liberated” from social oppression? Are the condemned perpetrators of today the victims of tomorrow?

need to be “liberated” from social oppression? Are the condemned perpetrators of today the victims of tomorrow? Not too far from us, last year, German liberals made a serious proposal to abolish the criminalization of incest. Perhaps the mainstream media will soon stand up for these so-to-speak phenomena, as it has done with the sexual minorities that have been made acceptable. It’s no longer possible to come across a Hollywood movie nowadays in which an LGBTQ personage portrays a negative character. He or she can only be a victim in the story and under no circumstance a hated, repulsive figure, whereas in reality, there are mean, vile gays too—just as there are wicked individuals among heterosexuals. Who knows? Maybe scripts about friendly paedophiles and lovable incest are already in the making.

The good news for victims of people with a victim mentality is that rule of law (for the time being) ensures that accusations without proof are insufficient to ruin one’s reputation. Courts (at least for the time being) do not make judgments based on mere claims, alleged or actual harm to victims, but on evidence—but perhaps not for long. Adjustments in the field of law are slow but definite: It is enough to take a look at the Equality Act in the U.S. In addition to disallowing discrimination between men and women, this law, which is currently only a proposal, also prohibits discrimination based on a partner’s sexual orientation and

to their identity. Splendid! We bear witness to the expansion of freedom of choice, or do we? What is happening, in fact, is the measured effacing of freedom of traditional thinking and the simultaneous solidification of the views of the prevailing ideology.

I have good news for those with a victim mentality too: Breaking away from the victim’s role is very much possible, but only for those who have truly decided on it. I guarantee that taking off one’s victim suit will not prevent anybody from living a diverse, joyful life to the fullest without the need to shame and cause remorse for others. People who manage to accept the wrongful circumstances and reconcile themselves to the fact that they can even benefit from the heavy burden which they need to shoulder cease to be victims. They instead become free people who, under certain circumstances, may even be the ones to generously give in, upon realizing that the other person making demands unjustly is more in need of getting the given thing than they are, as they can do without it. One does so, not out of a perverted desire for suffering, but in a Christian way, voluntarily, placing the other person before oneself. For revenge is taboo, the only real taboo. According to the Christian faith, revenge is God’s only. This is the only way to stop the vicious circle of mutual aggression: One of the parties must get off the hate train.

What is the solution then? Actually, it is possible

to humble oneself in relation to perpetrators, for instance victim-mentality individuals. Otherwise, our response will be cross and short-tempered when we fail to prove them wrong. Flaunting oneself like the victim of the victim mentality is still nothing more than another face of the victim mentality. Enough of pussyfooting: They are, in fact, perpetrators: they are anything but real victims. They mean to tax true victims; they are the stowaways of conciliatory missions who found not only a legitimized but also a supported way to let loose their fit of passion.

Let us glance at the calendar for a moment. We have already passed the International Day for the Elimination of Racial Discrimination (March 21st) and the International Day against Homophobia (May 17th), but the International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women is still ahead of us (November 25th). When should we expect the announcement of the International Day for the Elimination of Victim Mentality? It would be much preferred if each day in the calendar were dedicated to common sense. On every such day I invite every one of us to live and act according to our traditional values, without the evils of hatred and vengeance.

From a Christian perspective, distancing ourselves from revulsion and revenge is imperative. I strongly believe that there is a way for victims and perpetrators alike to unknot a tense situation without tipping over the edge. This is the single path that is worth seeking, the path of humility, love, and sobriety that Jesus walked. Jesus did not make an effort to bring about social change, however much the nation in the victim's role wished He would. He was in the way of both the globalist left-wing party (meaning Herode, who was in league with the Romans) and the nationalists (Jewish Pharisees). Today still, Jesus' enemies are evenly scattered among the left-wing and right-wing. Alas, even Christians themselves are divided in this regard. The mission of Jesus did not concern itself with ideology; instead, He laboured to bring change to individuals one by one; he wanted to rid us of the fetters of sin through conversion. Sadly, people would rather deal with issues centred around views about the one true, just society and blame the opposing party, than face their own suffering and misery. As we have seen, it is easier to identify with and root for social movements and

ideologies than it is to resolve our inner conflicts.

The example given us by Jesus carries an unmissable message for all who consider themselves victims: Despite being a true victim, He never accused, blamed, or coerced those who were responsible for bringing on His death. A peculiarity of the Hungarian language is that the word "áldozat" denotes both a person having suffered injustice (*victima*) and a sacrifice offered to God (*sacrificium*). The first carries a palpable, negative undertone, whereas the second refers to something divine and saintly. It is up to us whether we go through life's ups and downs according to the first or the second idea. Conversion can safeguard us against turning into a manipulative *victima* instead of a *sacrificium*, carrying the cross.

Christian teaching holds that Jesus died not as a victim of His adversaries' ill will, but as a self-sacrifice for others' benefit. It is He whose footsteps we ought to follow: We need not hate the perpetrators or the victim-mentality individuals, and neither should we play the game of the latter if our paths cross. As for victims of crime, I urge everyone to give them a helping hand without a second thought. Trying to interpret the world based on a binary approach will prove to be a defective endeavour. The world cannot be summed up only in black and white, in perpetrators and victims, for it is a sliding scale of hues. Truth is, we all are, from birth, both perpetrators and victims at the same time. We have the exceptional opportunity to accept Jesus' calling and leave behind sin to become a sacrifice offered to Him. The only question is whether we are ready to seize it. Will you accept His calling to make a sacrifice for somebody else? Or in case some calamity has befallen you, are you willing to take responsibility for your own part in it first, to look for the reason of your suffering, and to search for its divine logic, voluntarily and of your own free will?

### Endnotes

1. Balázs, Kiss - Lilla Petronella, Szabó – Xénia, Farkas: Ki lehet áldozat? Viktimizáció a 2017-es magyar metoo-vitában; In: Politikatudományi Szemle, 2021. issue 1. 14-126 pp.
2. Szabolcs, Varga – András, Bálint: Családon belüli erőszak – amikor a férfi az áldozat, Belügyi Szemle, 2020/4, 9-52. pp.

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# BOOK REVIEWS

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Carl Rhodes, *Woke Capitalism: How Corporate Morality is Sabotaging Democracy*. Bristol University Press, 2021. 240pp. 978-1529211665, and Muhammed Yunnus, *A World of Three Zeros: The New Economics of Zero Poverty, Zero Unemployment, and Zero Net Carbon Emissions*. New York, Public Affairs Press, 2017. 304pp. 978-1610397575. Reviewed by Marc L. Andreas, Associate Professor of Business Leadership, Kuyper College.

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Teaching business and economics at a Christian college and preparing future business leaders for the wider world means staying engaged in the current conversations, whether the speakers are professed Christians or not. To this end, two newer books caught my attention. Each one advocates for one side of the current debate regarding companies involving themselves in broader social-justice issues. As I plan to bring up this debate in my upcoming classes, my students, like our society at large, will surely have different views. Some may agree that companies should step up to make a difference with major challenges in our society, while others may prefer that businesses remain focused on their economic duties and avoid explicit involvement in social or political issues.

Carl Rhodes, the author of *Woke Capitalism*, sees a direct correlation between the erosion of democracies and companies becoming vocal and active in social issues. He provides a helpful background on the history of the word “woke”: a term referring to being awake to (or cognizant of) what is actually happening in society in terms of socio-political issues, in contradistinction to those who may not be paying attention. For Rhodes, the new and growing trend of companies becoming active in social issues is a type of capitalism that is actually a rhetorical ruse to maintain our current status of significant economic inequality. In his opinion, companies are only providing lip-service in favor of certain social issues, but in truth they don’t sacrifice enough to make a significant difference. Corporations are merely “going woke” (or “liberal”) to ensure that capitalism continues and people are satisfied with (or don’t pay attention to) the current inordinate gap between the rich and

the poor. Ultimately, he is both cynical and pessimistic. For Rhodes, companies are motivated to say the right things to make sure that the majority of people don’t revolt against the income and wealth inequality that exists in the US and many other major democracies.

As an Australian, Rhodes spends most of his time explaining current issues such as Black Lives Matter or climate change to help provide an American context to readers who may live outside of the US. However, he concludes each chapter with very little evidence of how these movements and problems will actually erode democracy. There are plenty of anecdotes about large corporations in *Woke Capitalism*, but little measurable evidence of how exactly our democracy is changing. For example, he claims that wealthy CEOs giving away millions of dollars to charitable organizations working on social issues is replacing our government’s efforts to do so through a democracy. He discusses Amazon at length—how Jeff Bezos is pledging to give \$1 billion/year to fight climate change over a ten-year period—but it does not seem clear how that is replacing the \$400+ billion/year that US corporations pay in taxes, a large portion of which gets funneled into social programs.

Fundamentally, Rhodes is unable to accept the blurring of the three spheres of government, business, and nonprofits, as most want to do good and solve problems. He wants strict divisions of these spheres. What about social enterprise, or the 5,000+ B-Corps in more than 80 countries around the world that focus on tackling social and environmental challenges? His only solution to the problems he describes seems to be that companies should stop being active in social issues and let the

government take care of these instead. It seems illogical, and a bit naive, to assume that the wealthy business elites are giving away millions (and billions) of their dollars—often publicly and jointly—as a secret method to keep the masses supportive of an economy that continues to allow them to make their millions (and billions).

Rhodes makes the mistake of trying to oversimplify our complex world by imagining a vast, hidden conspiracy, and thereby misses the benefit of drawing from Abraham Kuyper's idea of sphere sovereignty. Even from his nineteenth-century perspective, Kuyper advocated for a collective effort that both (1) acknowledged the expertise of each sphere or sector of society and (2) encouraged those spheres to work together to tackle some of society's biggest problems (such as poverty, educational inequality, and the negative impacts that the industrial revolution was having on families and communities). Only when multiple spheres work together, each playing a vital role in impacting a social issue, can we bring Christ's shalom to the suffering in our world.

In contrast and as a much better alternative to Rhodes's book, Muhammad Yunus' *A World of Three Zeroes* shares more than three decades of experience in leading and supporting the exponential growth of social businesses around the world. So-called "social businesses" (also known as "social enterprises") are the new kind of business that focuses on solving social or environmental problems while still remaining profitable. Utilizing inspira-

tional stories and robust metrics, Yunus provides convincing evidence of how the new movement of businesses working on social problems can collaborate with governments and nonprofit organizations to make significant progress on some of the biggest social challenges in our world. This movement is widespread in Yunus's home country of Bangladesh but is now also growing rapidly in many larger developed countries such as the U.S. The importance and opportunity here cannot be overstated. As Yunus explains, "[s]ocial business represents a crucial element in the transition from our current greed-based civilization to a civilization based on the deeper human values of sharing and caring. It's a transition we must complete successfully if we want to pass along a truly sustainable way of life to the generations that follow us" (142).

Yunus may not be a Christian, but it seems obvious that God has granted him the wisdom to help us all get a glimpse of a godly economics, one that honors God's design for our world. In my upcoming Kuyper College classes, my students will be reading Yunus's book. We will be exploring Abraham Kuyper's sphere sovereignty together and looking for evidence of its blessings in the everyday business interactions that populate our lives. How might we, like Muhammad Yunus, create communities filled with businesses that promote and reinforce social justice, economic fairness, and environmental sustainability? This is a key twenty-first-century question for all of us.