

When Money Became God

Survival and a minimally acceptable lifestyle has value, despite the fact that these are defining characteristics of the rest of the living world.

"I don't know whether my life has been a success or a failure. But not having any anxiety about becoming one instead of the other, and just taking things as they come along, I've had a lot of extra time to enjoy life."

- Harpo Marx (the "silent" Marx brother, he played the harp beautifully)

I have often wondered if Harpo never spoke because his other brothers talked so much that Harpo couldn't get a word in edgewise. (And if the reversal of letters in his name--Oprah--inspired the mother of the television personality, who named her own company Harpo Productions.)

If I could pick one defining characteristic of western culture it would be that we teach the need for success, particularly success in an occupation that brings considerable income. We teach, by example if not by word, that those who do not make a lot of money are failures of society, people who must be supported by charity because they can't make it through life "successfully" on their own.

We do not widely teach that survival and a minimally acceptable lifestyle has value, despite the fact that these are defining characteristics of the rest of the living world.

We do not generally teach that anything is more important than the acquisition of money, with the possible exception of ways of spending money that bring comfort and recognition.

Money being a man-made concept (gender bias inserted on purpose), people who believe that money is the most important thing in life find themselves progressively less able to accept that anything other than that which has been made by people has value. We conquer and destroy non-renewable natural resources and genetically alter renewable ones to suit the needs of our aggressive industries. And extinguish the rest.

Any concept of a supernatural being--despite lip service being paid by many in business--becomes that which cannot be believed or that which is of little importance because western business has created its own deity. Except for those who derive a very good income from religion, each of which defines its own version of God.

Living a full life means reaching a pinnacle of success before retirement, the pinnacle being defined at least by public recognition if not by actual financial income. Anything that is not within the control of business is given short shrift in terms of having importance to society. Artists are great, for example, only if they are recognized by wealthy patrons.

As Harpo Marx said in the quote, people give so much recognition to the importance of financial success that they spend much of their time thinking about it--how to get money and how to spend it. The burden of that goal, which is unreachable by many people, has caused multitudes of us to suffer anxiety which we relieve with drugs, exercise programs, religious devotion, mental illness, addictions and shopping.

Few will admit that they teach these values to their children. They do it by example, by being role models for that way of life. Most children follow the values of their parents, if not as adolescents then later in life. Even television commercials and magazine advertisements tweak our brains to believe that we must strive to be better than we are now.

The state of affairs in most western cities attests to the fact that something has broken down in the creation of this man-made capitalistic heaven. We have so many social problems, but no solutions because a solution would require that we teach people that something other than money is important. That could not happen because those who control much of the money in our societies ensure that such heresy could never make it into our school curriculum.

Business leaders tell us that our social and community problems are necessary consequences of our success in capitalist enterprise. On more than one occasion I have been faced with this argument while being interviewed on

conservative radio stations in the US. FOX News lives it.

Those who believe that there is something more important in life than money, its acquisition, investment and dispersal must teach others, beginning with their own children. They must speak about how so many lives are being ruined by devoting them to being the pawns of business.

They must speak and write to others about what is more important than money. They must live the role model of a non-money-controlled life that is more fulfilling than those who see the Donald Trumps of the world as their role models and life aspirations.

They must teach that you can seek happiness by chasing money, but you will never find it. Money chasers never have enough, thus by definition can never be truly happy.

Does it require a revolution in thought, a massive overturn of the predominant way of life in the western world? No.

It requires only for you to understand that there are more important things in life than money and that the reckless pursuit of it will prevent anyone from finding those better things. Find the better things yourself. Then tell others. Change happens one person at a time. It happens in person, face to face.

For those who believe that there is nothing more important than money, there will be nothing more important. Understand that they will be tirelessly aggressive about teaching their money-chasing values to everyone they can. They already dominate some aspects and activities of schools.

If money were really worth chasing, then rich people should be happy. They aren't. They just like to show off as if they were. They don't even know what happiness is. They tell themselves that having money is what makes them happy. Maybe it does in their minds. But their having money is not likely to make you happy.

Money is not a god. We have no need to worship it. We have many other needs which have greater importance and which are not being met by many people. The money god doesn't care for the failures of life.

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