

Sept. 13, 2007
Progressive Ponderings
Hierarchical Systems – Part 1

My mother expressed it. My wife voiced it (but hasn't lived it). My daughters refused to even mouth the word "obey" in the marriage vows.

"His-story" has always been recorded and spun by the powerful which means it has a patriarchal and aristocratic flavor. It is a his-story of hierarchy. We have been culturally conditioned into believing that this top-down, obedience-oriented method of organizing is the "natural order." Religions, structured in a similar manner, have frequently decreed that hierarchy is the plan of God, the natural order. All of humankind's mythical gods have had similar plans, which, of course, benefited religious leaders.

The regressive right, including the religious right, has outlined the hierarchical natural order as: God over king or president; king over men; men over women; men and women over children; humans over nature. Competing for position within these structures accounts for much of the violence that contaminates many of our hierarchical systems.

Our hierarchical systems include gender, race, culture, class, government, law, military, schools, ownership, world order, even heaven. Hierarchical systems are preserved through a variety of means – law (just and unjust), obedience, punishment and reward, fear, violence, and the myth of divine mandate.

The hierarchical negative effect on human undertakings can best be recognized through experiencing a truly democratic organization. Today, this type of community is frequently called a non-governmental organization (NGO). They number in the millions around the globe and these numbers are growing rapidly. These horizontally organized associations substitute cooperation among equals in place of individualism and competition. They grow and enrich with new ideas and creative methods. NGOs show exciting possibilities.

The effect of dominating hierarchical structures and systems is to stifle creativity, exclude the majority of society the opportunity of participating and expressing ideas. Hierarchs frequently manipulate subordinates into fear and hatred often leading to violence.

Horizontal associations multiplying today often hatch through common interests – peace, energy, environment, spirituality, immigration, race, gender, etc. In other words new systems are rising because the old systems aren't responding to human concerns and needs.

The citizens of the United States lag behind other peoples in creating effective NGOs. We still believe the myth that because we are allowed to vote every couple of years we have a democracy that hears our voices. Our pursuit of the material produces a passive conformity and obedience in the political realm.

People subjected to brutal hierarchies are more inclined to take risks to change oppressive systems. And the risk is great. Hierarchies – political, governmental, business, wealth, race, cultural and

religious systems – have historically reacted with extreme violence to maintain privilege. The risk of violent backlash today comes against those NGOs declining to participate in the global economic empire. Dictatorships and democracies are crushed with equal severity by forces of wealth and empire.

But still NGOs push on. Thousands are represented at the relatively new World Social Forums, themselves horizontal. NGOs are progressive. They place people over systems.
jmayer

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