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HANG TOGETHER

*"We must indeed all hang together, or most assuredly we shall all
hang separately." – Benjamin Franklin*

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RE: THE FOLLY OF “FREE” COMPASSION

Posted on October 24, 2012 by Daniel Kelly

I'M ALL ABOUT PUTTING PRINCIPLES INTO ACTION, SO I ESPECIALLY appreciate Kyle's thoughts on what it might look like if, one day, we were to relegate the oxymoronic policy of forced compassion to the ash heap. I completely agree that we cannot wait around until the state abandons this mindset.

If I am right about compassion being a love response (and I am), I think it follows that people (both recipients and providers) will find it an extraordinarily attractive alternative to the ersatz version the state has been championing for so many years. There's something moving about finding out someone actually cares about you; and cares enough to help.

The church should be leading the charge in restoring compassion to its proper place. But it has been letting the state eat its lunch. No . . . that doesn't quite capture it. A large segment of the church has prepared the lunch, personally walked it to the state's offices, set the table, and invited the government to feast. This is tragic. Not just in the sense that it ought to be otherwise. More in the sense that it makes one want to weep in frustration, or anger, or just heart-emptying sadness. Here's why.

It is the church's glory to care for the poor and the widow and the helpless. It's not a burden. It's not a chore. And it's not something that can be satisfied by posting the 3-figure balance of the "deacon's fund" on the back page of the church bulletin.

Jesus didn't leave the church many mandates. It's not like the New Testament is an ancient version of the Code of Federal Regulations, stuffed from cover to back with endless and mind-numbing directives on what he expects of us.

It's so simple. Love God. Love your neighbors. How simple is that? Simple enough that when a lawyer thought to excuse himself from its simplicity by quibbling over the second command, Jesus slapped him down (lovingly, to be sure) with the Good Samaritan.

Being the Good Samaritan should be the church's central organizing principle, not a peripheral program. We say we want to bear witness to God's unmerited favor and teach people of his love. But then we outsource to the state (the *state*, of all things) the best, highest, and sweetest way to bring his love to others.

There are those who accuse me of favoring too much the life of the mind. There's some truth to that – I get a thrill out of searching for and discovering principles that I can build into arguments, arguments I can arrange into structures, and structures that can order my affairs. But you can't live life only in your mind. And so, sometimes, sometimes, I ache to see God's love. To *see* it, in the light of day with my waking eyes, not just know of it. If I, already a Christian, long for this, how much more those who do not know of that love at all?

Compassion is what love looks like – gathering a fallen stranger into your arms and dressing his wounds while the dirt of the road soils your clothes. Not metaphorically – *really*. Compassion meets physical needs, and in meeting those physical needs reaches deep into that void that unknowingly craves the Creator's love.

The church cheats the world to the extent its face, its heart, its pulse, becomes something other than compassion. And when it allows (or worse, encourages)

the state to steal its glory, it bears witness that it has forgotten what it is. Small wonder so many people think the church frivolous and irrelevant.

We talk and sing of God's love with no end. Our fellow Americans, however, are waiting to *see* it. So, naturally, we send them to the local welfare office to find it. What disgrace, what shame.

Leave your thought

THE FOLLY OF FORCED “COMPASSION”

Posted on October 23, 2012 by Daniel Kelly

SO . . . FEDERAL AND STATE GOVERNMENTS HAVE SPENT OVER 1 TRILLION of your dollars on means-tested welfare programs in the past year. That number does *not* include Social Security or Medicare, just so you know. You might wonder what such a jaw-dropping amount of money might buy. I thought you might, because I was wondering too.

Well, apparently, it doesn't buy much at all. According to the Congressional Research Service, \$1 trillion is enough to eliminate poverty in the entire United States. But that doesn't even begin to capture the relationship between poverty and welfare spending. That \$1 trillion is enough to wipe out poverty in

our country *five times over* (thanks, Heritage Foundation). A little like using a fire-hose to douse a match, don't you think?

Yet still the match burns. The poverty rate in America sits at about 15% today. And that percentage has been on the rise even as the amount we spend on poverty elimination has increased. Hmm. Shouldn't there be an inverse relationship between poverty and anti-poverty spending?

If people were simply bank accounts whose balances needed replenishing, the answer would be "yes." They're not, of course. A 15% poverty rate translates to about 46.2 million people who are officially poor. Which means there are approximately 46.2 million reasons for the nation's poverty rate. Poverty is not a group problem, it is an *individual* problem. Any serious treatment of the issue needs to account for this.

Unfortunately, the government's approach to poverty has been to treat it as a one-dimensional group phenomenon. People really *are* little more than overdrawn bank accounts. I'm not faulting the good intentions of our legislatures or the bureaucrats who carry out their policies. I am, however, noting that government is a blunt instrument that is institutionally incapable of the personalized treatment the intractable problem of poverty requires.

More to the point, I'm suggesting that the fact of government involvement is partly responsible for the problem's intractability. In trying to translate Americans' admirable compassion into legislative programs, we didn't account for the human dimension. We forgot that compassion and compulsion are mutually exclusive. It turns out, in fact, that compulsion kills compassion. What we meant for good actually bred envy, resentment, and pride. How could a noble sentiment like compassion turn into such a poisonous brew?

If we look at the human dimension of welfare programs, I think we'll find the answer. Let's start with a simplified mental diagram of how welfare programs work. Each program consists of a relationship between these three groups: (1) The state, (2) the program recipients, and (3) the people from whom the resources come to fund the program – otherwise known as taxpayers. Think of it as a triangle with the state at the apex, the recipient on the lower left, and the taxpayer on the lower right.

Here's a basic lifecycle of the typical welfare program. Legislators identify some measure of poverty in need of amelioration, and under the banner of compassion they adopt a new welfare program. The state then compels the taxpayers to fund the new program. The state takes its cut of the compelled revenue, and passes along what's left to the undifferentiated group who qualify for the program.

Now let's see how that transaction affects each of the participants. We'll begin with the beneficiaries. Welfare recipients have a "right" to their benefits. If they meet statutory standards, benefits follow automatically. Recipients can even sue for them if improperly denied. No surprise, then, that a large segment of welfare recipients expect to be supported by the government as a matter of right. And if they are entitled to support, it follows that it ought to be enough to satisfy their needs. However much they receive, though, it's never enough because the "rich" always have so much more and, doggone it, the disparity between me and thee just shouldn't be that great. This is how we breed envy: Teach people they have a right to what belongs to others. So the beneficiaries descend to reliance on the state, and envy of their fellow man.

The transaction harms the providers too. People work hard for their income, and the vast majority must carefully budget their resources, scrimp for the

essentials, do without some things so they can afford others with a higher priority. Notwithstanding Americans' legendary generosity, they do not appreciate being compelled to give up their hard-won income to someone else. Especially when that someone is telling them that they have too much as it is, and that they must be made to pay their "fair share," or that we should "spread their wealth around." This is how we breed resentment: Take from those who create and give it to people who don't. Consequently, the providers resent both the state and their fellow man.

And finally there is the state. Politicians are lauded or lambasted in large part based on their "compassion." The compassion, of course, is measured by how much money they transfer from one group to another. It's strange, when you think about it, how they congratulate themselves for giving something that was not theirs to people to whom it does not belong. But that is how we breed pride. Politicians begin to believe they are morally superior to the providers, and paternalistically superior to the beneficiaries.

This is the folly of forced "compassion." Compassion cannot coexist with compulsion; it is a love response, and love cannot be compelled. The Good Book has something to say about this: "Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." I Cor. 13:4-7. Is there anything there compatible with compelled wealth transfers? I didn't think so either.

If God is love, and compassion a loving response, maybe God belongs at the apex of the triangle instead of the state – if we're looking to be compassionate, of course. Sitting right behind the commandment to love God with all your

heart there is this: “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Mark 12:31. What if we did?

To start with, a welfare recipient would no longer be a welfare recipient. He would be an individual and the object of someone’s love. He would receive gifts, not entitlements. People respond to those differently. Understanding that someone has willingly sacrificed some of his hard-won income, with no obligation to do so, he will respond with gratitude, not envy. He gives thanks . . . he doesn’t complain he has not received more. And because he sees that the giver has provided for him not out of overwhelming abundance, but out of limited resources, he will be more likely to do whatever it takes to get out of poverty.

The transformation reaches the giver as well. Where once there was resentment, there is now . . . what? The compelled taxpayer is now the voluntary giver. He recognizes his shared humanity with the one in need and, grateful for his own resources, reaches out to alleviate his fellow man’s suffering. Why, that’s *compassion* that has taken resentment’s place. This is the real thing, a love response born of self-sacrifice, not a grudging response compelled by others.

There is still the matter of the triangle’s apex. Denied their pretensions to compassion, politicians would have to find some other basis for self-congratulation. In their place, God would receive the well-deserved love of his creation – both from the poor, who are grateful He has prospered others enough to help them in their need, and from the givers who get to experience the joy that comes with giving.

There may be other justifications for forcing one person to give what he has created to someone who has not earned it, but please let's not pretend it's compassion. If we really care about our fellow man, we ought at the very least take a hard, critical look at the damage our faux compassion is causing. What have we bought with that \$1 trillion? Not the end of poverty, certainly. But we've got more envy, resentment, and unwarranted pride than we could ever need.

4 Thoughts

EPISTEMOLOGY-SLINGING AT THE OK CORRAL

Posted on October 16, 2012 by Daniel Kelly

GREG HAS CHOSEN EPISTEMOLOGY AT 20 PACES. SO BE IT. NOW, Greg has steady nerves and keen aim, so this doesn't bode well for me. But my Irish heritage has given me a genetic inability to duck a challenge. All I'm hazarding, however, is public embarrassment, so here goes.

In Greg's view of things, the cultural elite (no less than the gentleman watching Family Guy with a six-pack standing by) are insensibly marching in circles with too little thought given to where they have been and where they are going. That is to say, they haven't given enough attention to the effects of what they do, and so are not intellectually responsible for what follows.