

THE ROBIN HOOD SYNDROME

For over two centuries Americans voluntarily and willingly provided the lion’s share of social welfare, charity and education—without government subsidy. This impressive feat was accomplished through biblically based, charitable, grassroots giving through individuals, families, churches, foundations and private associations.

In sharp contrast, America today suffers under the burden of confiscatory, compulsory taxation and overspending by big government. It is crippling our productivity and lowering our standard of living. Disguised as modern-day Robin Hoods, governments of the Western world (including our own government) embrace the failed philosophy of Marx and Engels and systematically steal the money and property of their own citizens. But, as Margaret Thatcher famously said, “The problem with socialism is that eventually you run out of other people’s money.”

Honest scholars know that the key to the future is always found in understanding the past. Professor Marvin Olasky documents the historically proven method of decreasing much of our government’s bloated welfare budgets, which comprise most of our spending and have burdened us with trillions upon trillions of dollars in unfunded, unsustainable liabilities. Olasky shows that privately directed Christian compassion has been the major social welfare net of Western Civilization for 1600 years and that it can, even in the 21st century, save our societal structure from a catastrophic collapse.

America, from its inception, was a Christian experiment. Every institution, including charities for the truly needy, the elderly, and the infirm, was based upon biblical values. The same was once true of educational institutions. From the time of the Pilgrims, the colonies were a shining example to the world, “a City on a Hill.” With restricted government and low taxes they

managed to create the world’s greatest nation out of a barren wilderness in only two centuries.

By the 1840s [private] societies to help the ‘worthy poor’ were springing up in every major American city. To this day the most effective care for the needy comes from America’s army of Christian charities, many of

which were founded in the 19th century.

Throughout most of the 19th century, 90% of all charity and welfare was Christian and private. This care provided spiritual renewal, teaching in character skills and occupational training needed to promote upward economic mobility. All this cost the taxpayer little, since it was accomplished on a local,

personal level. America, without the burden of government welfare, maintained low taxes and created a model of economic freedom and mobility unheard of in history. The American standard of living increased 900% in the 19th century.

But by the 1850s, a destructive philosophy that promoted a coercive, ever-expanding government began seeping into the American psyche through men like New York publisher Horace Greeley, a Universalist (one who believes that all men are saved and good). Greeley promoted the idea that private wealth should be divided up by the government to level the playing field (a form of theft, in reality). He also believed that government should manage all care of the poor. Greeley’s ideas were radically socialistic, pre-dating the dogma of Karl Marx.

Henry Raymond, also a prominent publisher but a devout Christian, challenged Greeley to a debate in print which lasted 12 weeks on the front pages of their respective newspapers—Greeley in the *New York Tribune* and Raymond in the *New York Times*, of which he was editor. Raymond argued powerfully that compassionate



charity which cared for the truly needy was best accomplished through individuals and private organizations. He documented that the way to fight poverty was through the personal transformation of individuals through God's regenerating power. But he warned that government control of charity would lead to corruption, bureaucracy and the end of liberty for all. Raymond believed, as did our founders, that because of mankind's sin nature, the larger governments become the more they corrupt and enslave the governed. Thomas Jefferson warned us 200 years ago that "The functionaries of every government have propensities to command at will the liberty and property of their constituents."

As the debate continued, Greeley countered with his call for government to reorganize and redistribute wealth in the name of God. He contended that giving our wealth to the government to distribute and control welfare was "the duty of ever Christian, every philanthropist." Raymond countered that by empowering the government to take over charity, the individual would then forget the mandate to "love his neighbor," assuming that the government would take care of those in need. As we know, that was what happened over the next century and a half.

Raymond won the debate. But through this exposure, Greeley was able to take the lies of utopian socialism and social Darwinism out of the back alleys and radical underground newspapers and move them into the American mainstream media. By the 1870s, "Boss" Tweed and his band of elected thieves had robbed the city of New York of \$160 million. They gave a tiny portion to the poor to buy their votes, as corrupt politicians have done since the days of Ancient Rome.

During the 20th century, American universities were increasingly tainted with curricula that promoted a "Robin Hood" socialism. Throughout the century the tragedy of "compassion" in the hands of big government unfolded. The tragedy continues today as most people see no alternative to giving much of their income to an all-powerful government to meet the welfare needs of our communities. In reality, by nature, government builds its own burgeoning bureaucracy and increases its own power and wealth.

What can we do to reverse the march to cultural bankruptcy that threatens our nation? Conservative economist R.E. McMaster speaks of the nearly invisible counter-movement to our statist bureaucracy made up of millions of families and entrepreneurs fighting for freedom. He writes, "We are moving back toward free-

dom-oriented horizontal relationships and clearly away from vertical, slave-like, bureaucratic, centralized relationships, such as those dominating our economy." McMaster exposes the fact that "We haven't seen entrepreneurs shine to this extent since the transition from an agriculture society to the industrial society in the late 1700s and early 1800s."

He concludes his analysis of the challenge ahead. "We are in a desperate race. If won by the agents of moral decentralization, we face the prospect of a glorious, free, prosperous, creative, technological new age. If won by the agents of centralization, we face a statist, bureaucratic, miserable tyranny.... This is a race none of us can escape running. It is a race between the frozen old economic order and the fast-growing new one. It is a race between a free market and no market at all. It is a race between vision, self-sacrifice, and a long-term view [i.e., the Christian work ethic] versus blindness and indulgence, culminating in short-term death. [i.e., Socialism]"

Who needs the warped dreams of "income redistribution" when we have God's army of compassion? Millions of Americans are caring for our own aged and sick and reaching out to others in need. Millions more are adopting children and helping unwed mothers restore their lives. The light coming from a million points, not from Washington D.C., shines ever more brightly in times of trial. As more and more of us do our part, lives can be transformed, taxes can decrease, and personal prosperity can explode. This is the model of society blessed in Scripture and the historically proven one used in early America which made our nation the economic engine of the world.

— Marshall Foster

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