



Welfare's real cost is the dignity of millions

Ismael Hernandez

Oct. 6, 2013

Compassion without respect is akin to animalizing people; at best it is condescending paternalism.

By the closing of the 19th century, the way we served the poor underwent profound changes, culminating with a vision of poverty alleviation placing government at the center.

The bureaucratization of compassion has been the result of that historical process, with the federal government commanding the social welfare arena.

Those who think the poor will crumble without government subsidies are acting in ways that render the poor as inferior beings, objects moved by forces instead of subjects with the capacity for self-realization.

At every turn the poor show us that they have that capacity but we prefer to kill the spirit of poor communities under the weight of the “free stuff” we dump at them. Compassion has become transactional instead of relational.

Without realizing it, they render the poor as childlike and irresponsible, incapable of becoming moral beings that can change their lives by the choices they make. Feeling sorry for them we refuse to recede to the background to become witnesses of a story whose protagonists ought to be the poor themselves.

To treat a mass of able-bodied humanity as eternal victims is not true compassion. The incentives offered by a cradle-to-grave, comprehensive, welfare state foster permanence in the condition of poverty. In the end, the poor remain alienated from their own potential, kneeling before the idol of the state, one they hate but still worship. Politicians benefit, as they become the generous doorkeepers of benefit.

A recent study by the Cato Institute shows that people on welfare are not lazy, they are often given an incentive to remain dependent.

Welfare more than minimum wage in 35 states, even after accounting for the Earned Income Tax Credit. In another 12 states you would see a decline in your income if you get a job paying the

same as welfare assistance does. In another 12 states you would actually see a decline in your income if you get a job paying the same as welfare does.

In 11 states, welfare pays more than entry-level wages for a teacher; in 39 states more than a secretary.

Of course, not every welfare recipient receives every possible benefit but the system creates the incentive to stay there. The rational short-term incentive is to remain where they are and eventually get trapped and lay down on the hammock of dependency that once looked like a safety net.

With so many non-profits having as a major task connecting the poor to the manacles of government “compassion” and getting their hands at a piece of the loot, we can see how a system that disrespects the poor can be confused with one that “helps” them.

This degrading system has created an unholy alliance between those at the top and at the bottom, with corporations also receiving welfare assistance as an exchange for political allegiance.

What is the choice we offer to the struggling poor? Just find yourself an enabler! There are many out there cloaking themselves in the rhetoric of “social justice” when what they are perpetuating is a fraud. When you reject the fake compassion of dependence and place the poor as active participants instead of passive recipients, you highlight their dignity. When you fail to do so you hurt them and I don’t care how much money you dump into federal “anti-poverty” programs, you still hurt them.