

A Plea for Fairness and Shared Sacrifice

As a parish minister during the years of the U.S. government's "faith-based charity" initiative, I frequently found myself thinking uncharitable thoughts. It seemed to me the "faith-based charities" enthusiasts were more interested in undercutting the role of publicly-funded and public-governed institutions in providing human services than in actually seeing those services provided. Anyway, I protested, why should faith-based organizations be expected to carry the burden of meeting the physical and social welfare needs of the American people? This is dereliction of duty!

It is really absurd to expect problems of poverty, hunger, housing, education, and health care access of those in need to be adequately addressed by anything less than broad-scale government programs. Religious organizations should do their part, but they simply lack sufficient financial and human resources to complete the job. Moreover, religious institutions receive the bulk of their funding from a rather small percentage of the U.S. population (probably less than 10%). Should this small segment of the American people foot the bill for everybody else? Talk about unfair!

It is widely recognized today that we need health care and health insurance reform. We need to invest in education, job creation, affordable housing, and so on. But nobody seems to want to pay the bill. Hear this, legislators: I'd be thoroughly delighted to pay my share of the bill and more. I just don't want to pick up the tab for those with much bigger bankrolls than my own. I'm in no mood to be a chump – and the fact is that my resources, if not combined with those of everybody else, amount to a tiny drop in the bucket. Let the burden be shared by all, in ways proportionate to the wealth and income of every person, family, or business.

Much of the anger against Wall Street these days seems based, rightly, on the perception that the Big Boys are raking in way more than their share, and at the expense of taxpayers and the common good. It's simply obscene. But it's not just Wall Street. If everybody with a six-figure income and/or a million dollar net worth – and all those who aspire to such – would agree to be taxed fairly, there would be plenty to go around. Sharing the wealth is hardly a total solution, but we'll never become a just and caring society without it. Modest "sacrifices" now could help accomplish a world of good.

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