



Sovereign Order of Saint John of Jerusalem ©
* Knights of Malta *

February
2014

Chancellor's Update

Income Mobility and Inequality

Why is it that in today's world certain politicians when introducing new solutions to problems vehemently proclaim and promote their ideas with no opportunity for debate or compromise? Opposition or alternative solutions to issues such as inequality or women's reproductive rights are not tolerated; opponents are harassed, demonized and often politically destroyed.

In the 1500s the Fathers at the Council of Trent, when writing about sins against the Sixth Commandment described such individuals.

IMPURITY BLINDS THE MIND AND HARDENS THE HEART

“But even though the adulterer may escape the punishment of death, he does not escape the great pains and torments that often overtake such sins as his. He becomes afflicted with blindness of mind, a most severe punishment; he is lost to all regard for God, for reputation, for honor, for family, and even for life; and thus, utterly abandoned and worthless, he is undeserving of confidence in any matter of moment, and becomes unfitted to discharge any kind of duty.

“Of this we find examples in the persons of David and of Solomon. David had no sooner fallen into the crime of adultery than he degenerated into a character the very reverse of what he had been before; from the mildest of men he became so cruel as to consign to death Urias, one of his most deserving subjects (2 Kings xi. xii). Solomon, having abandoned himself to the lust of women, gave up the true religion to follow strange gods (3 Kings xi). This sin, therefore, as Osee observes, takes away man's heart and often blinds his understanding (Osee iv.11).”

Four centuries later St. Maximilian Kolbe, who was eventually martyred at the infamous Nazi death camp in Auschwitz, discussed the issues of inequality. [St. Kolbe](#) recognized the following:

When he sees the luxurious residence or the charming country house of a wealthy person, a poor workingman often asks himself: “Why is there such inequality in the world?” How many volumes have been written about equality among men! How much blood has been spilled for this idea! And yet, in spite of it all, we still have the rich and the poor... Let us imagine that one day all the inhabitants of the world would assemble to put into effect this sharing of all goods; and that in fact each person, granted that the world is very big, received an exactly equal portion of the wealth existing on earth.

Then what? That very evening one man might say, “Today I worked hard: now I am going to take rest.” Another might state, “I understand this sharing of goods well; so let's

drink and celebrate such an extraordinary happening.” On the other hand, another might say, “Now I am going to set to work with a will so as to reap the greatest benefit I can from what I have received.” And so, starting on the next day, the first man would have only the amount given him; the second would have less, and the third would have increased his.

Then what do we do? Start redistributing the wealth all over again?

Even if everybody began to work right away with all his might and at the same time, the results would not be identical for all. There are, in fact, different kinds of work, which are unequally productive; nor do all workers enjoy the same identical capacities. This leads to a diversity of results achieved, and consequently to differences in people’s profits.

I (The above article was taken from Catholic Vote Blog, by Tim Shaughnessy) would note also that even the same person experiences varying levels of income over their lifetime. Before people get in a huff about the gap between rich and poor (and by “huff” I mean “wanting laws or taxes passed which rob Peter to pay Paul,”), and before they get tempted to vote for candidates who promise to help the poor by getting the rich to pay “their fair share,” [a basic understanding of income mobility \(click here\)](#) is needed.

[St. Kolbe](#) recognized what many in politics today do not. Correction: many in politics today *do* recognize the perverse incentives that result from income distribution programs, but the votes they receive while pushing such programs exceed the votes they would get if they abolished such programs. They only get those votes because we voters are more easily swayed by dramatic appeals to our own envy than to empirical data or bar charts demonstrating that tax and economic policies consistent with liberty are superior overall.

“To continue the argument, even if there were only two persons in the world, they would not succeed in maintaining absolute equality; for in the whole universe there are no two things completely identical in every respect...

In spite of this, the human mind still desires to bring about certain equality among men. Is there any possibility that this can happen? Yes, no doubt. Every man, whoever he is, whatever he possess and whatever he is capable of doing, owes all this to God the Creator of the universe. Of himself man is nothing. From this point of view all of us are absolutely equal.

“Furthermore we all possess free will, which makes us masters of all our actions. This too constitutes the basic equality of all men on earth. But the use made of our free will is not the same in all cases; it depends in fact on each man’s own determination, on the extent to which he makes use of this precious gift; for not all do so to the same degree. It follows that not even after death will perfect equality be achieved; it will not in fact exist, because every man will receive a just reward or punishment according to his deeds, good or evil.”

St. Maximilian Kolbe. I (Tim Shaughnessy) found this quote in a 2008 Magnificat. (I ripped the pages out to save and didn’t write down the exact date). I can’t verify the following citation, but found the above quote on some other pages with the following attribution: The Kolbe Reader: The Writings of Saint Maximilian M. Kolbe (Libertyville, IL: Franciscan Marytown Press, 1987).

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