

Compassion – Does it Come Free, Easy, Without Consequences?

Compassion

I assume it was the 1980s when I heard this story, or report, concerning Margaret Thatcher and the Good Samaritan. The then-PM was supposed to have said that the Good Samaritan had the advantage (over others in the story, presumably) in that *he* had the wherewithal, the means, the cash, to help the man fallen among thieves, and that if he hadn't, he couldn't have helped.

Of course, she was taken to task as being unfeeling and harsh, and promoting the virtues of the existence of people with wealth - and maybe the Widow of the Widow's Mite was suggested as a morally-better alternative; compassion was, actually, what counted. Maybe, but the fact is that even the widow had a *mite*, and without that, without something, anything, to give, compassion is worthless – which brings me to *my* point: that *compassion always has a price*, must have, whether one is a rich Samaritan or a poor widow.

If you want to give to charity, you have to have at least some money to give. Now, that giving may just mean putting a small coin or two in a collecting box in the shopping centre; but it could mean responding to many of the appeals for those in severe need, seen on our television screens. A regular monthly payment to UNICEF (I've just seen a TV appeal) can be quite a commitment if you suspect that your job may be in difficulty somewhere down the line. But what of an even bigger story of human tragedy, such as the refugees/asylum seekers, flooding into Europe, with many heading for Britain?

Many people are very moved by pictures of drowned children, just trying to get into Europe, and would urge us to remove *all* barriers to letting people in, without exception. But there is payment, a cost (hasn't the Archbishop of Canterbury said he'd be willing to house people in Lambeth Palace? Wouldn't that begin to *cost* something, in terms of its (inevitably deleterious) effect on his life and work, before long?).

Poverty, starvation, displacement by war/bad regimes are, of course, ongoing and perpetual (remember the starving Biafra babies? Well, maybe everyone is not as old as I). Have we *real* reason to believe that there will *ever* not be war/bad regimes in the Middle East, or somewhere? Yes, if our sense of compassion and hope blind us to reality. Allowing, as our compassion urges us, to let all-comers into Europe, will have a price, like all compassion. The price is the eventual loss of democratic, Christian, law-abiding – compassionate – values, and society, in Europe; we won't evade that fact, however much we currently try to deny it. Are we prepared to pay that price? Why?

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