

Virtue Out of Balance Isn't Virtuous

By JOHN VINSON

Compassion is the battle cry of the open borders religionists. They raise it in holy defiance of all practical objections to their cause. To be a good Christian, they inform us, you must offer a welcome mat to the world, and not complain if the world makes you its doormat.

Certainly, compassion is a Christian virtue, but many modern Christians fail to appreciate—as Christians did in the past—that a virtue not held in balance with other virtues becomes an unbalanced idea, one likely to cause great harm in the real world. In this respect, many Christians today have uncritically followed the secular moralists' embrace of airy disjointed ideals, i.e., equality without regard for quality or distinction, and freedom unlimited against license.

The Catholic theologian and writer G.K. Chesterton saw this problem quite clearly when he wrote:

The modern world is...full of wild and wasted virtues. When a religious scheme is shattered...it is not merely the vices that are let loose. The vices are, indeed, let loose, and they wander and do damage. But the virtues are let loose also; and the virtues wander more wildly, and the virtues do more terrible damage. The modern world is full of the old Christian virtues gone mad. The virtues have gone mad because they have been isolated from each other and are wandering alone. Thus some scientists care for truth; and their truth is pitiless. Thus some humanitarians only care for pity; and their pity (I am sorry to say) is often untruthful.

To the example of truth and pity, noted by Chesterton, let's consider another, *courage* and *prudence*. Courage without caution ceases even to be courage, and in fact becomes reckless abandon. Similarly, prudence without courage ceases to be prudence, but merely cringing cowardice.

So let's apply this principle to compassion, particularly as it relates to how Christians should regard

immigration policy. One virtue necessary to balance compassion is humility, in this instance a humility based on a realistic appreciation of limits.

Immigration advocates, non-Christian and Christian, often give the impression that they oppose any limits on immigration, and that we must admit everyone who wants to come. A Gallup poll in 2012 found that 150 million adults would like to move to the United States. With our family reunification laws, they could bring in their spouses, children (kids and adults), siblings, and parents. They in turn can bring in their relatives, and on and on.

Thus if we do away with all immigration restriction and invite everyone to come, we conceivably could have a half-billion or more new arrivals in the next couple of decades. Do we have the means to provide a better life for them all? Obviously, our country doesn't. We come to this conclusion if we practice a humble and candid appraisal of our limitations.

The sad but inescapable reality is that America today is a nation in decline. More and more, we are a country of apathy, alienation, and distrust of public institutions. Accelerating this trend is the multiculturalism fueled by mass immigration. As our common culture erodes, we have no effective standards to acculturate our younger generations, let alone assimilate a massive flow of immigrants. Division and balkanization now loom ahead.

Economically the "American Dream" is slipping out of the reach of native-born Americans. Middle-class jobs are vanishing as well as blue-collar jobs that pay decent wages. In the past it was those latter jobs that provided upward mobility to many native-born citizens and immigrants alike. Immigration plays a role in this process by increasing competition for jobs and suppressing wage levels. Consequently, the U.S. is beginning, economically, to resemble the Third World countries sending us most of our immigrants, with a growing divide between a small number of people at the top and the masses of not-so-well-offs below them.

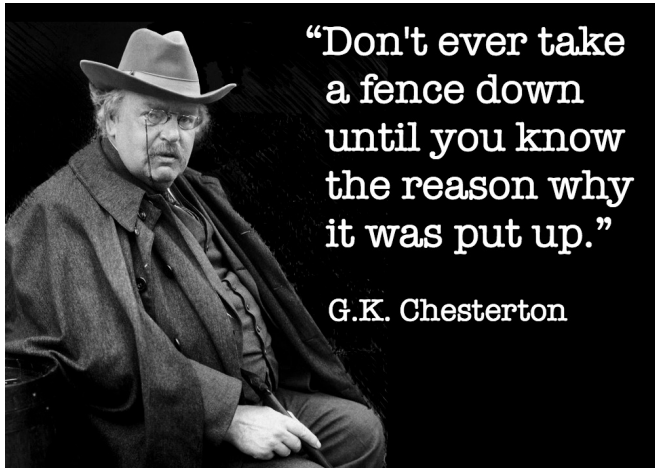
The question immigration advocates should consider is which outcome better serves the goal of sustainable compassion, a U.S. that retains sufficient cohesion and wealth to provide for others, or a U.S. as blighted and bankrupt as most of the rest of the world. The

John Vinson is president of the American Immigration Control Foundation.

answer should be obvious. From a Christian perspective, the statement of *Proverbs* 3:27 comes to mind: “Do not withhold good from whom it is due, when it is in your power to do so.” The virtue of humility, as well as honesty, can teach us the limits of that power.

Immigration advocates, secular and Christian, might accept the possibility that immigration shouldn’t totally swamp us, but insist that compassion still requires us to accept a very high level without giving any preference to the needs and interests of American citizens. Such compassion is unbalanced by the virtue of duty, specifically the priorities of “[to] whom it is due.”

Christian tradition and scripture affirm a hierarchy of loyalty and obligation, starting with the family. As *1 Timothy* 5:8 states, “But if any provide not for his own, and especially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel.” Thus, as one can deduce from this scripture, that people have a greater duty to their own than to others.



“Don't ever take
a fence down
until you know
the reason why
it was put up.”

G.K. Chesterton

Interestingly, the phrase “his own” is used in another context to refer to national identity (*John* 1: 11), thus suggesting that preference for kinsmen extends to the national family as well. Also affirming this view is the statement of the Apostle Paul expressing a preferential love for his national kinsmen (*Rom.* 9:1-4).

From cover to cover the Bible affirms the division of humanity into “nations, tribes, and kindreds.” For these divisions to exist, members must practice in-group preferences. That was the case with ancient Israel, used by God to bring Christ into the world. The Israelites were indeed commanded to show goodwill and compassion to “strangers” who traveled through their land or lived among them. That compassion, however, did not come at the expense of Israelite nationhood. The Bible describes strangers and Israelites as two separate groups. Israelites were granted a superior position in terms of rulership and inheritance of land. Strangers could dwell in Israel only on the condition that they obeyed its laws.

Thus, the immigrations enthusiasts are wrong when

they cite the Old Testament for making the stranger equal to or superior to the native. Indeed, it specifically states that strangers having power over natives is a national curse (*Deut.* 28:43).

And as it was then, so it is now. “Compassion” at the expense of one’s country and countrymen is a sentiment unbalanced by the demands of loyalty and patriotism. It is an exercise in egotistical moral posturing, like that of Charles Dickens’ character Mrs. Jellyby, the woman who uplifts foreign children while neglecting her own. The Jellyby mentality applied to immigration is allowing foreigners to come and displace our citizens, but culturally and physically. The practical consequences of such displacement are scarcely different from those of a military invasion.

Some who misconstrue compassion are at least sincere in their error, but some others cynically use the word to hide their base agendas. Their “compassion” isn’t restrained in the least by honesty. The New Testament (*John* 12:1-6) illustrates this variety of deceit. In these verses, the disciple Judas objects to money being spent on perfume to anoint Christ, saying it should be kept in the disciples’ treasury to help the poor. But as the account goes on to explain, Judas had no compassion for the poor. He was a thief who wanted the money in the treasury so he could steal it.

Accordingly, skepticism is appropriate when certain Republicans proclaim their compassion for immigrants. Like Judas, they are simply seeking to enrich themselves, specifically through cheap immigrant labor. Nor should we give credence to those Democrats who profess boundless love for the foreign-born. Their goal is political power by corralling immigrants as a bloc of cheap votes.

Bogus compassion is destructive to everything that true compassion would foster. So on immigration policy, what would real compassion look like? Basically, it would be reasonably generous, while allowing America to remain America in culture and character. This, again, is the only kind of America that will have the inclination and means to be generous.

This policy would work from the premise that in a world of limits, most people who seek a better life will have to do so where they are born. And certainly a strong and coherent America can aid this quest through realistic programs of foreign aid, trade policy, and diplomatic pressure on foreign governments to better the lives of their citizens. Most people really don’t want to move far away from hearth and home, so enabling them to stay would be true kindness.

Christ observed, “By their fruits you will know them.” Compassion, in harmony with other virtues, yields beneficial results. Outside that harmony, compassion is indeed “a virtue gone mad,” and its fruits are manifest in our unfolding disaster of mass immigration. ■