

Individualistic Nations Provide the Most Charity for Strangers, Survey Shows

Christian life relies on faith, not on sight. But it is a serendipity when social science bears out its teachings about spiritual and religious freedom – and it is particularly delicious when those findings are featured on NPR.

“The world’s wealthiest and most individualistic countries also happen to be some of the most altruistic,” [wrote](#) Georgetown University’s Abigail March on the news service’s website.

A 2017 [study](#) (which relies, in part, on the work of Angus Deaton) has found “dramatic shifts toward greater individualism around the world,” rising by 12 percent since 1960. March compared this with an annual survey by the [Charities Aid Foundation](#) and was startled by the results.

“The nations that provide the most help to strangers,” she wrote, “include the world’s five [most individualistic countries](#) ... the United States (2nd most generous), Australia (3rd), New Zealand (4th), Canada (6th), and the United Kingdom (8th).”

A beggar with no ties to the society, according to March’s analysis, would fare better in a free society than a collectivist one.

“Members of collectivist cultures do very much value generosity and giving – but primarily toward family and members of other close-knit groups,” March writes. Collectivist nations separate people into indelible categories that both are unchosen and unchangeable. In less free societies, charity encounters hard and unchosen boundaries:

tribe, ethnicity, religion, language, or nationality.

“Their philosophy presumes that group identity is paramount. That’s the fundamental philosophy that drove the Soviet Union and Maoist China,” said Jordan Peterson in his recent, well-publicized [interview with Cathy Newman](#). “And it’s the fundamental philosophy of the left-wing activists. It’s identity politics.”

Economic or biological determinism and their attendant identity politics are a miasma, whether promoted by the Left or the Alt-Right, because they replace concern with indifference. They constrict love and compassion.

Looking at the data, March has discovered a hard truth: Collectivism is a strong enough force to close the human heart.

Individualist societies see people precisely as *individuals*. It is the defining mark of the Parable of the Good Samaritan, who ignored ethnic loyalties to care for a fellow human being in dire circumstances. In the Eastern Christian tradition, Jesus is identified with the Good Samaritan and referred to as *O Filantropos*, “the Lover of Mankind.” Christians are called to respond to His initiative by proactively seeking out opportunities to care for the His suffering children.

In light of the data, March concluded that “equating individualism, and the wealth that promotes it, with selfishness may be a mistake.” (One wishes she used a stronger verb than may, but one may forgive an academic.) She would have found another confluence by noting the most philanthropic nations’ relative positions on the Fraser Institute’s [world ranking of economic freedom](#): U.S. (13), Australia (7), New Zealand (3), Canada (5), and the UK (10).

By the same logic above, *mutatis mutandis*, you could conclude that it is a mistake to ascribe the promotion of a free market economy to selfishness, or “greed.” Those of us who promote

economic freedom and a free and virtuous society do so precisely because it [aids those most in need](#): the isolated individual with no community to care for him or her – and because it frees the rest of us to become Good Samaritans.

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