NATIONAL CATHOLIC REPORTER
Published on *National Catholic Reporter* (http://ncronline.org)

Those Pesky Poor People

Michael Sean Winters | May. 29, 2013 Distinctly Catholic

At the Acton Institute's website, they have an article by Elise Hilton [1]in which she expresses her consternation that more and more people are on food stamps. It is a revolting, but a revealing article.

For example, she asks why, if joblessness is going down, more people are on food stamps than ever before. Perhaps, Ms. Hilton should investigate the phenomenon that her much beloved free market is producing such low wage jobs that people who get one are still living in poverty. Nah. Better to blame the whole thing on government "recruitment" of people to sign up for SNAP, as the food stamp program is known. Heaven forbid government should let people know there are programs for which they are eligible and, if Ms. Hilton's reading is correct, I suppose she and her friends at Acton need to lighten up on the charge that government is hopelessly incompetent. This program of letting people know they are eligible for food stamps and signing them up for the program is evidently working quite successfully.

But, the really alarming paragraph is this:

SNAP is symptomatic of America?s current view of the role of government: It is there to take care of our every need. Rather than seeking a way to solve problems of joblessness and hunger, we simply grow the programs once-designed to help only in a crisis. Of course, the only way to grow these programs is to increase taxes on those who are working. As Samuel Gregg points out in ?Becoming Europe[2]?, this creates an atmosphere of conflict, rather than harmony, in society. It means standing behind the food stamp user in line at the grocery store and grumbling about their purchases: In a sense, it is your money they are spending on soda and chips. It also means, according to Gregg, that there is less incentive to be productive on the part of citizens; after all, won?t the government take care of things?

Funny, when I am in the line at the grocery store and the person ahead of me pays with food stamps, I do not feel the need to grumble, do you? I usually feel grateful that the Lord has provided me with a modest but sufficient income that I do not need the help, and also grateful that such help is there for people who do need it. And, furthermore, I wonder if Ms. Hilton really has had this experience because at the supermarket I use, where there are often people paying with food stamps, I do not see their purchases ("soda and chips" she says) being hugely different from what others are buying. While I am not a fan of soda myself, it is a sin against nature to eat a corned beef sandwich, as I did yesterday, without chips and a pickle. Seriously, though, why this resentment? Where is the gratitude? Why this willingness to put theoretical economic constructions ahead of the real needs of living, breathing people?

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[1] http://ncronline.org/SNAP%20is%20symptomatic%20of%20America%E2%80%99s%20current%20view%20of%20the

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[2] http://www.becomingeurope.com/