

THE CHARITY PUZZLE by Si Frumkin

Someone e-mailed this joke to me: “Bill Gates walks into a bar – and just like that everyone there, *on the average*, becomes a millionaire!”

I have a variation on that: “Bill Gates walks into a bar – and just like that everyone there, *on the average* has given millions to charity!” Just in case you don’t get it, Bill Gates, allegedly the world’s wealthiest man has endowed his charitable foundation with about \$3 billion. In addition, Warren Buffet, the world’s 2nd wealthiest, has already contributed 1½ billion to it and pledged \$1½ billion yearly for 20 years. At this time the Gates Foundation has an endowment of over \$35 billion and if there were, say, 20 people in the bar in addition to Buffet and Gates, the average contribution would be more than \$15 million each.

But even without Bill and Warren (who I am sure don’t do their drinking in bars) the average Americans in that and other bars contribute much more to charity than their counterparts elsewhere according to a survey of charitable giving conducted by an authoritative international organization. The survey compared charitable contributions by the country’s inhabitants with their countries’ Gross Domestic Product (GDP).

The results are remarkable! The U.S. contribution is 1.7%, **more than twice that of 2nd place U.K with 0.73%**. It is followed by **Canada, Australia and South Africa** with about 0.7% each; **Ireland and Holland** with 0.5%; **Singapore, New Zealand, Turkey** and **Germany** with about **two tenths of one percent** and - *tah-dah-tah-dah!* – in last place among the supposedly civilized, compassionate and caring nations, who else? – **France** - with just **1/10 of 1%**. They now have another reason to despise us: the average American gives **12 times** more to charity than a Frenchman and we obviously do this only to humiliate them!

I don’t know if it is the Christmas season that is responsible for all the new information that has been made public about who, what and how much people are giving to charity. The studies come from the United Nations, the IRS, several large informational and polling organizations and from research scientists.

Christmas – and of course Chanukah - are, after all, supposed to be the times of

giving gifts and one of the more remarkable results of charity research is that those of us who say “Merry Christmas” or “Happy Chanukah” give more charity than those who use the generic and politically correct “Happy Holiday Season”. Syracuse University professor, Arthur C. Brooks, conclusively proves, in his new book *“Who Really Cares?”* that religious conservatives give considerably more to charity than do secular liberals.

Professor Brooks classifies conservatives as those who regularly attend church, support two-parent heterosexual families and have a dislike for government-supported services. Brooks, who was brought up in a liberal home, says that he didn’t anticipate reaching these conclusions but had an obligation to be honest.

“For too long, liberals have been claiming that they are the most virtuous members of American society. Although they usually give less to charity, they have nevertheless lambasted conservatives for their callousness in the face of social injustice,” Brooks says.

It isn’t just money. Liberals, according to Brooks, also donate less volunteer hours, give blood less often, and seldom participate in civic community efforts.

On the other hand, in spite of the generosity of the multi-billionaires at the beginning of this column, the first-ever IRS analysis of charitable giving has come up with the surprising conclusion that the least generous Americans were young and prosperous – taxpayers age 35 and under who earned more than \$1 million, and those making \$500,000 to \$1 million. Both groups gave, on the average, 0.4% of their assets while those earning \$50,000 to \$100,000 a year gave 2.5% of their assets – six times that of the wealthier people their age!

Age is a major factor in American generosity. Those 65 and older do not show much diversity in giving between the middle class and below – 0.67% of assets given – and the upper middle class and rich – 0.80%.

The 51 to 64 group the difference is significant: 1.22% for the middle class and a drop of nearly half, to 0.72% among the upper middle and middle rich..

Among Americans aged 36 to 50, the difference between the wealthy and those less wealthy is even more significant: 1.52% for the middle class and just 0.74% for the upper middle and middle rich classes.

Finally, in the 35 and less age group, the variance is greatest: 1.87% among the middle class and 0.54% for the wealthier ones.

The IRS admits that it has no good explanation why the less wealthy are more charitable than the wealthy. In all groups under age of 64 the wealthier classes donate a *lower* proportion of their investment asset wealth to charity than do their far less prosperous peers.

I have no explanation either but, according to the reports, it certainly looks like the stingiest person in the world is a rich liberal Frenchman atheist under 35.