

The Pitfalls of Largesse

Rockefeller Found That Not Everyone Was Grateful

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The Bible says it is more blessed to give than to receive, but, if you are rich as Rockefeller, the business of charity can be the devil's own headache.

Old friendships can sour. The public is less than grateful. Cynics insist on misunderstanding your motives. And hordes of hopeful people are banging on your door, trying to get a piece of the action.

"I have been asked for so much money for so many years," Nelson A. Rockefeller said wearily at one point yesterday. "That I am impervious to requests for money."

Yet he has given away so much of it over the years—\$2 million to friends and political associates, more than \$21 million to certified charities. Yesterday, the Senate Rules Committee spent all day looking the gift horse in the mouth, so to speak, and it gave a lot of spectators headaches. It even exhausted the normally ebullient nominee for Vice President.

"This has been one of the most exciting experiences in my life," the former New York governor croaked hoarsely at the conclusion of his testimony, while a confusing tangle of hundred-grand generosity still lingered in the minds of his audience.

Rockefeller, as he explained to his Senate interrogators, took serious business in the Lord's Prayer about forgiving your debtors: He forgave \$50,000 in loans to his old friend, William J. Roman, now chairman of the New York-New Jersey Port Authority, and never bothered about interest or collateral.

"I have to say I never demand any of these in a strictly business sense," Rockefeller said. They were all acts of generosity. He forgave \$30,000 plus \$100,000 there or not. If someone worked for him long and hard, Rocky worried about his financial future—and often took care of it.

Sen. James B. Allen, the Michigan Democrat, remarked with his dog-eared

face that the incident had seemed to be on the lips of Nelson Rockefeller.

"The first Allen drewled was a state of indecision and the second was a death not always in the first state."

"I would say," Rockefeller replied, "that's a common trait of almost all Americans and that's one reason this country has done so well."

Well, the senator wondered what did all this talk have to do with Rockefeller the man? "Do you feel you've been something of a soft touch?" Allen asked gently.

To put it more bluntly, Rockefeller answered, "I don't think I've been a sucker."

"Do you feel you've gotten full value received?" Allen asked.

"In human satisfaction," Rockefeller explained.

Still, there are perils to charity, especially on the grand scale. His family's

Commentary

charity, for instance, has financed national parks all over the continent but now he is not so sure that the public is grateful.

"Before these hearings," Rockefeller confessed, "I thought there might be some appreciation among people for these gifts. After these hearings, I'm not sure."

This is getting to be a dubious question.

And sometimes, he added, even the recipients can sour on their wealthy patron if, for instance, his money steers them into some stock investments which go down instead of up.

"I have found that even worse than making loans to friends, giving advice on investments is the best way to lose friends," Rockefeller said. "If they win and they make some money, they forget you gave them advice. If the thing goes down, the tendency is to feel you let them down. I don't mean to be cynical, this is human nature."

With some embarrass-

ment, the Vice President designate explained that even he has been on the receiving end of the family's legendary generosity. And, when a Rockefeller gives to a Rockefeller, they don't send candy.

In 1954, his brother and sister gave him a total of \$150,000. The money, he insisted, was not to help him with his losing presidential campaign that year, as some suspected. It was a family gesture of "friendship and love," intended to help him get over his divorce.

The senators, of course, were not really interested in the "human satisfaction" Rockefeller derived from his charity. They wanted to know if he got anything else for his money.

Isn't it possible, asked Sen. Clairborne Pell (D-R.I.), that a \$100,000 no-interest loan to a state official might effect his judgment on public issues? "It is possible," Pell answered himself, that he will take action on your behalf that you may not even want him to do—he'll be overly subservient.

That couldn't happen with his people, Rockefeller explained. They were too independent-minded, too aggressive in their policy debates.

"I never wanted to have a bunch of yes-men," he explained. "Were I to have

surrounded myself with a group of court jesters I don't think I would be sitting here as a nominee for Vice President of the United States."

Still, as the senators slogged laboriously over the details of the loans and gifts, the dates and amounts and the generous terms, it became clear that the issue was not what the money did for Rocky, so much as what it did to his associates.

Sen. Pell coaxed out of him a formal promise that he would not continue his lavish generosity as Vice President, restricting gifts to other federal officials to "nominal" items at Christmas or weddings or birthdays. But what does "nominal" mean to a Rockefeller?

"A Christmas ham perhaps," Pell explained afterward, "but not a whole herd of hams."