



Cowls in the Hood - How to Help the Poor

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Beginning this Thursday, your local PBS station will be airing a powerful documentary called *The Rule*, from Bongiorno Productions. It follows the monks of a Benedictine abbey called Newark Monastery. That's Newark, as in New Jersey. The monastery runs St. Benedict's Prep there, a school for young men from the inner city — from the slums, not to put too fine a point on it. Whereas two thirds of poor kids never get any higher education, the boys who attend the monks' school go on to college at a rate of about one hundred percent. Which, for those of you who weren't educated in a Benedictine monastery, means all of them.

I urge you to watch this show. It's incredibly involving and moving and uplifting. And, if you care about the heartbreaking and intractable problems facing America's poor and oftentimes minority youth, it's instructive.

It's hard for those of us who didn't grow up in these neighborhoods to quite understand what happens there. Obama-style leftism strikes me as such a sinful religion in regard to the poor because it conveys to its believers a sense of virtue while its philosophies and programs — learned resentment and victimhood coupled with subsidized bad behavior — devastate the actual lives of the people they are theoretically intended to help. Those of us on the right can be forgiven for suspecting leftism's much-vaunted concern for the underclass is really just a means of consolidating and increasing the power of the powerful.

But the attitudes of many on the right, while generally far less harmful, can also be purblind. It's all well and good to point out that education and faithful marriage will likely keep a man from a life of poverty. They will. But if at ten years old you're watching your mom turn tricks for a hit of crack, you're probably not going to grow up thinking straight enough to follow the good path. Black churches that have abandoned Jesus Christ in order to preach the Democrat Party don't help a whole lot either.

The point is, poverty recreates itself by generating the behaviors that cause it. Democrat pols may be vampires who drink the blood of the poor for power, but pull-yourself-up-by-the-bootstraps Republicans who never campaign in the slums have nothing to be proud of either.

What the monks of Newark Abbey are doing is not conceptually revolutionary. Faith, discipline, belonging, fatherly support — we all know these are the things that make the difference in a young man's life. Why then is it so difficult to replicate the abbey's results? Because someone's got to go in there and do the work, that's why. The monks deliver the goods. They're there day after day. They're not making speeches about it. They're not blogging about it. They're doing it. And the effects are glorious to see.

Watch *The Rule*. It'll make you laugh and cry and think differently. It's well worth your time.