

Government: The One and the Many – The Balance Between the Individual and the Community

A proper understanding of the various issues in government and politics requires an objective understanding of the basic ontology or metaphysics of human nature. Ron Sider provides a good summary of a foundational issue:

“God designed us for community. We simply cannot be the whole persons God intended without embracing the importance of communal joys and obligations. And the deepest foundation of this truth is that human beings are created in the image of the triune God, a loving community of three equal but distinct divine persons who together are one God.

The biblical story’s affirmation of both the personal and the communal aspects of who we are is absolutely essential for political thought.

Western liberalism in the tradition of John Locke overemphasizes the individual and ends up with the radical individualism of contemporary Western societies. The free, isolated individual is all-important, and communal obligations are largely abandoned. (We can see this individualism in divorce laws that ignore the needs of children, in abortion laws that place sole authority for choosing an abortion with the mother rather than the

family, and in economic laws that ignore our mutual obligations to care for each other's material needs.)

The other extreme is equally disastrous. A one-sided emphasis on our communal nature ends up in stifling traditional societies with little freedom for individual choice or in modern totalitarian societies (whether Nazi or communist) that crush all individual freedom. The significance of seeing people not first and foremost as separate individuals or constituent parts of a large collective, but persons in mutual relationship cannot be overstated. We must hold together both the importance and freedom of each person and the interdependence of all upon one another. An understanding of people grounded in the biblical view of persons created in the image of the triune God will insist that people find fulfillment not in self-assertive individualism or totalitarian communalism but in a community of freedom, love, and mutuality that treasures both individual freedom and the common good," (*Just Politics*, Ron Snider, 36-38).

JUST POLITICS

A Guide for Christian Engagement

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