



Searching for a Winner: Doctrine of Unity: The Enlightenment, Deism, & the Conflict of Visions between Christian Tradition & Liberal Rationalism

Going “astray from the faith” indicates the mental attitude of those in Corinth. They think they are free agents but they are not. They are under the authority of their sinful natures and have in fact placed themselves under its dictatorial regime.

It’s interesting therefore to contemplate that those who profess their desire and intent to be free of authority figures, systems, rules, and order are in fact in slavery to a dictator within their own bodies. Their thinking is controlled and manipulated according to the “traditions of men” and they are anything but free.

The condition that has led to this disaster is one of over-emphasis on individualism. Individualism has its place but it must be flexible if the individual hopes to function in community with others and especially in communion with God.

An analysis of this problem is the subject of an article in the current issue of *Chronicles* magazine by Donald W. Livingston. But to fully appreciate his writing it will be helpful to review the definitions of The Enlightenment and deism.

Kohl, Herbert. From Archetype to Zeitgeist: Powerful Ideas for Powerful Thinking. (Boston: Little, Brown and Co., 1992), 65:

The Enlightenment. The Enlightenment is the name given to an intellectual and philosophical movement that developed in eighteenth-century Europe and is characterized by its belief that reason, and not superstition or the authority of unexamined tradition, can solve all of the problems of humanity. Progress through reason and science is a central theme of Enlightenment thinking.

Enlightenment thinkers rejected the idea that religion can be a source of truth, and believed instead that the application of reason to the evidence of the senses is the sole source of the truth. Nature can be discovered and understood rationally, and when so understood will be seen to be good and beautiful.

God’s will can be seen at work in nature without the need of supernatural intervention. This attitude toward God and religion, characteristic of much Enlightenment thought, is called deism.

In conjunction with their deist beliefs, Enlightenment thinkers replaced ideas of divine authority and the rights of kingship with ideas of universal human rights and the natural rights of all individuals.

Deism. Deism is the belief that God exists but can be understood only by studying the normal course of nature and history. Deists do not believe in divine revelation such as contained in the Old and New Testaments. They deny that God can be revealed through a divine or supernatural agency. Deism was developed in England in the seventeenth century by anti-Christian rationalists influenced by the works of John Locke. It had many adherents in France, England, and the United States in the eighteenth century during the Enlightenment.

And now the article from *Chronicles* by:

Livingston, Donald W. “Communitarians, Liberals, and Other Enemies of Community and Liberty: Scaling Back the Enlightenment.” *Chronicles*, July 2002, 23-25:

I remember a time when the terms “community” and “virtue” had almost disappeared from philosophical discourse.

Moral virtue had vanished because Enlightenment liberalism had come to dominate the Western intellectual classes. The ethics of liberalism explicitly reject the traditional moral conception of virtue. By rejecting virtue, the liberal tradition was not merely substituting one ethic for another but rejecting morality altogether.



Morality, as traditionally conceived, supposes, first of all, a metaphysical vision of the nature of man and the sort of life that is good for man. Virtues are cultivated dispositions of character that enable the soul to live out the life that is good for man. A virtuous soul, with much training and over a long period of time, may come to love those things that are truly good as opposed to those that merely appear to be such. Second, morality presupposes a community. A man cannot know what the good is independent of a concrete way of life, lived in community with others, in which the good is exemplified. A man becomes good through emulation and by apprenticing himself to a master craftsman in the art of human excellence.

In a word, morality is *soulcraft* that touches every aspect of life: excellence in character, style of dress, manners, architecture, the form cities should take, the way gardens should be laid out, the preparation of food, what is worthy of remembrance, and so forth. Morality is an adventure, a whole way of life lived out in community with others across generations in pursuit of a common vision of the human good.

Communities are important because, like the family, they are the natural bearers of a valuable way of life. The 18th-century Italian philosopher Giambattista Vico \Vē'kō\ argued that man is transformed from an animal into a human being only when he can sustain the institutions of religion, marriage, and burial. The marks of a genuine community are the temple, the graveyard, and the wedding celebration. The favorable connotations that attach to this essential structure of human life are inappropriately applied to associations that are not communities at all—for instance, the “business community,” the “entertainment community,” “gated communities,” or the “homosexual community.” IBM does not have a burial ground; homosexuals do not marry and beget children; and “gated communities” are often places where affluent strangers move to escape the aftermath of social disintegration. The associations may have value but they are not communities.