



"No man is an island, entire of itself; every man is a piece of the continent, a part of the main."  
—John Donne

**15-May-09**

## *Individualism and Unity*

Since the election of President Barack Obama, the United States' economic policies have undergone a dramatic shift toward the Left, forming a policy-stew of capitalism and socialism. These two systems are built upon contradictory assumptions about the individual citizen and their role in the community. Capitalism, as outlined by its greatest voice, Adam Smith, relies upon citizens seeking their own well-being by relying upon services provided by others—an I'll-scratch-your-back-and-you-scratch-mine system that has proven successful. Socialism, on the other hand, sees the citizen as indistinguishable from his community. Whatever profit the citizen earns is given to the state to distribute "equally," whether or not the citizen wishes to do so. Historically, the success of socialism is nil.

Conservative politicians and pundits who are rightly concerned with the administration's transformational policies have been turning to one particular political philosopher and novelist to defend capitalism: Ayn Rand. Writing during the 40s through the 60s, Rand reacted against President Franklin Roosevelt's socialistic New Deal. In best-selling novels such as *The Fountainhead* and *Atlas Shrugged*, Rand crafts protagonists who take extreme measures to protect their individuality, such as an architect in *The Fountainhead*, who blows up a building he designed because the builders deviated from his original plans. Rand hails this strict individual spirit as the backbone of a healthy capitalist society and demonstrates how socialism or any other collectivist system strips the will of the individual and compromises the health of the state.

## CGG Weekly: Individualism and Unity (15-May-09)

President Obama, following Roosevelt's example, is removing increasingly more rights from the individual. Yet in her writings, Rand paints a portrait of the individual who is just as far from God's teaching as nanny-state, irresponsible socialism is. Her ideas crystallize into intriguing stories how Western civilization has viewed individuality from the Reformation and Enlightenment to the present-day drive to be different, which reflects Adam's original rebellion against [God](#) in the Garden of Eden.

Rand's and the West's appraisal of individuality can be summarized in a few concise points:

- Everyone is unique, possessing a free will that expresses one's distinctiveness.
- A person should preserve his uniqueness rather than conform to any standard.
- Preserving his life is the primary goal of the individual's unique expression of free will.

A quick visit to any high school will show these beliefs embodied in the younger generation. Piercings, tattoos, unkempt hair, odd clothing styles—anything that distinguishes *me* from *you* is cherished among teenagers seeking to forge their own identities.

Instead of Rand and her radical individualism, the Bible is the most important source for understanding who we are and what our responsibilities are. How, then, does God view the individual? Everyone is made in God's image ([Genesis 1:27](#)). Bearing God's image implies each individual has the responsibility to live up to it, and the spirit God put in mankind enables him a certain amount of understanding ([Job 32:8](#)). In addition, God has revealed His laws, which are encapsulated in Jesus Christ's two most important commandments in [Mark 12:28-31](#), both of which require a certain rejection of the self and sacrifice for God and others. Finally, the ultimate purpose of the individual is to be "hidden in Christ" ([Colossians 3:3](#)) by being transformed into the [image of God](#). Rather than establishing the differences we possess, God requires individuals to strengthen and grow in our similarities that He establishes as desirable.

God's view and expectation of the individual is far different from the world's notion. In fact, the *complete* individuality [the world](#) reveres really does not exist. Consider the foremost assumption anyone would make about individuality: "I am my own person, with unique character, personality, and aspirations." However, this is faulty. No one is an individual apart from the family he grew up with, whether it was a strong, nuclear family or the staff and peers in an orphanage. What we consider as our individuality has really been composed of our experiences along with our genetics, a fact that highlights the importance of God's intervention in our lives.

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We begin, not as individuals, but as this or that person's child. Family builds the initial foundation for who we are. Our upbringing, including parental guidance, education, interaction with siblings, and entertainment, weaves us into a way of life that is not easily unraveled. Into adolescence, our web of influences expands beyond the family to include friends, teachers, coaches, media, and the work place. By adulthood, these influences have solidified into a personality that may only be slightly altered. Despite how a person might desire, as Henry David Thoreau put it, to "march to the beat of our own drum," we typically only march to the beat of a drum others have fashioned for us.

Jesus implies our lack of true individuality in [Matthew 6:24](#), saying, "No one can serve two masters." Paul elaborates on this in [Romans 6:16](#), "Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves to obey, whether of [sin](#) leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness?" We must be humble and admit that we do not blaze our own trails, but are either following the pattern of the *kosmos* of this world or the way of Jesus Christ—there is no room for do-it-yourself Christianity. In addition, it even requires God's grace to be separated from this world, rendering the individual powerless to change himself without God's help ([John 6:44](#)).

Though cherished by men, raw individualism is a destructive force, especially lethal to the Christian. When Adam bit into the forbidden fruit, he told God he would do things his own way, an expression of individualism that generated the suffering and death that continue to this day. In contrast, we must sacrifice ourselves to God, becoming the agents of His will rather than our own. We accept His laws, wisdom, and values in order to become citizens of His Kingdom and a part of His church with others who have done the same. Our individuality is expressed through our decision to give it up and become like Christ instead.

Opposed to individualism is unity, though it requires the willing participation of each individual Christian to build this unity. We cannot deny that we are different from each other in many respects, but these differences must either be overcome or employed in the active edification of the unity of the Body of Christ. Within God's church, we have the strongest glue possible, His [Holy Spirit](#). Through love and unity, contrasting pride and individualism, we become more like God, reaching toward the goal of making Him "all in all" ([I Corinthians 15:28](#)) and transforming the church into the beautiful image of harmony Paul paints in [I Corinthians 12:12-13](#):

For as the body is one and has many members, but all the members of that one body, being many, are one body, so also is Christ. For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body—whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free—and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.

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## *From the Archives: Featured Sermon*

### [We Are Unique!](#)

by John W. Ritenbaugh

John Ritenbaugh asserts that to someone who has been called, there is a unique difference in the understanding and thinking processes not available to most of mankind. Without revelation from Almighty God, the heart becomes calloused and insensitive, having an enmity to the truth of God. Our responsibility is to freely choose to follow the revelation He has given us, overcoming the baggage and the doubtful resistance we have absorbed from the world's cultures. Until God removes the blinders from our eyes, we cannot use our free moral agency to develop the character, resisting the flood of deception spewed out by the deceiver.

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## *From the Archives: Featured Article*

### [Learning to Love One Another](#)

by Geoff Preston (1947-2013)

We may look around the church of God and wonder why so many are not being healed. Geoff Preston, suffering a chronic illness himself, uses his experiences to assure us that God is working out even these matters for our good.

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