

Everyone Is Different: Everyone Is Needed

I can remember wondering, years ago now, when I was a boy, whether I would ever see two people exactly the same, or come across someone sometime in some part of the world who would be the exact duplicate of myself. I know now that that will never be. But I remain deeply impressed with the realisation that throughout history, since time itself began, there have never been two people exactly the same and there will not be in the future. Just think of the people who are alive today (1981), well over 3,000 million of us, and no two the exact duplicate of the other. It says much about the infinity of God (and Swedenborg cites it as an example of it) that however small the differences may be, yet everyone of us is different. And because God is infinite there will be no end to the differences yet to be. Eyes, noses, lips, ears, cheek bones, hair or whatever.... the differences may be slight, but they will certainly be there.

"The following" wrote Swedenborg, "are some of the considerations from which human reason may see the infinity of God. In the whole of creation there are not two things the same. Human learning, supported by reason, has perceived and proved that there is no identity in things which exist simultaneously, and yet the substantial and the material things of creation, regarded individually, are infinite in number. It may be concluded from the rotation of the earth that no two results are identical in the succession of events in the world, because, owing to the inclination on her axis, the same position never recurs. Again, from a consideration of human faces it is clear that there is no identity, for in the whole of creation there is not one face exactly like another nor can there be to eternity; and this infinite variety can only exist from the infinity of God the Creator". (*True Christian Religion* 32).

It's a thought, isn't it? But search as you will, to the ends of the earth, if you care to, you will not find two people exactly alike, not even in the case of the closest identical twins. If you look closely enough there will be some noticeable physical dissimilarity.

What is true of people so far as facial features, or looks, are concerned, is just as true of them when it comes to their mind, and as to the person they actually are. Again, no two are exactly alike. There was a newspaper report a few weeks ago about identical twin brothers who, separated as infants, were recently re-united as adults. (This was somewhere in England). They wore similar clothes, were found to have similar tastes, did similar work even, and liked similar past-times. Not surprisingly, this has intrigued

the experts and they are flying them to America for further study. Even so, they are not and would not be identical men, close and similar though they are in so many ways. There are bound to be differences. And doubtless, as they get to know each other better, they will discover that this is so. I would like to read again, for a moment from that paragraph in Swedenborg's *'True Christian Religion'* which I quoted from a moment ago:

"The mind of one man is never exactly like that of another, whence arises the saying, 'Many men, many minds'. Therefore, the mind of one man, that is, his will to understand, is never exactly like that of another man. Consequently, the speech of one man with respect to sound, and also to the thought from which it springs, likewise his actions with respect to gesture and affection, are never exactly the same as another's."

No two of us, then, as thinking people, moved by different loves, interests and affections, is exactly alike. Our minds work differently, we see things differently, the way in which we look out on the world is different. Our attitude to our work, even if only in the slightest degree, is different from every one else's. The way in which we receive the Lord's truth and teaching, and the impact it has on us; even the very way we think about and comprehend God; all this is different.

Does this worry you? It shouldn't do, because there is something exciting and wonderful in it all. We are created differently and there is deliberate intention and purpose behind it all. What we inherit from our parents both in terms of physical features, mental characteristics, talents, capacities and inclinations is, of course, a most significant factor where our differences are concerned. So too are the influences which touch upon our lives and the differing parental attitudes even when it comes to children of one family. People sometimes comment on how amazing it is that the children of one family can turn out so differently. But is it really to be something to be wondered at. Should we in fact be so surprised? There have been, as we've just noted, the different characteristics, physical and mental, passed on to the children by the parents. They are one thing. And despite parental protests, children are not brought up the same. Number 3 is never treated as number 1 was. Parents learn. Their understanding of children improves. They modify their expectations of their children, and so on. And all this quite apart from the different influences and people who touch upon the life of a family at different times, in different years.

As we were created - each and every one of us different from the other- so it is meant to be. And this is what is so wonderful. It is as God intended it should be. Some are simple in their thinking and approach to matters. Others are profound. Some are practical. Others wouldn't know how to begin to change a wheel on their car, replace a washer in a leaking tap or even replace a light bulb. They are simply not practical. Some are at ease among people. Others are nervy and would rather not be noticed. We each possess such different qualities. And what is important is that all are needed. At times we get to envy people the qualities they have; it may be the ease with which they get on with people, can get up on their feet and talk, the lovely touch they have with children, or their rapport with the young. It might be a dozen and one things. Instead of either envying or aping them we do better, however, to cultivate and contribute what we have and what we can offer. Because there is something. Each of us is a unique individual (not, I hasten to add, that that reflects on us or that we should flatter ourselves because of it). Each of us is different. Each of us has something. It may be an ability to see things in a certain way. It may be a capacity for organising. Here again, it may be a dozen and one things. And, in the overall scheme of things, really, none is more important than the other.

I see this illustrated, and often think about it, where the body of ministers to which I belong is concerned, and the colleagues alongside whom I work. There are some who are scholars, and are obviously cut out for that kind of work. Others I know are excellent pastors. Some have a natural rapport with the young and are at their best working amongst them. Some have unusual ability when it comes to reaching out to new people which others of us don't have. But all are needed. These many facets of ministry all form part of the whole. We rejoice in the differences.

It has long impressed people that one of the things revealed and spoken about in Swedenborg's Writings, is the uniqueness and worth of the individual, every one of us being different, but - and at the same time - every one having a role to play or a use to perform. The human race has its perfection from the variety which exists within it, culturally, racially, as to human characteristics and abilities. So, too, does heaven have its perfection from the variety which exists within it.

Swedenborg in fact used the Latin words, *Maximus Homo*, or in English, 'Grand Man', to describe heaven. He writes that heaven appears before the sight of the Lord as one man, not in terms of shape, but in terms of the way it operates and functions. Just as

the human body has all its different organs, skin, muscles, blood vessels, and all the other things, each depending on the other, of course, each operating in harmony with the other, so it is in heaven. People coming into heaven, because they are different and have different capacities and abilities, will take their place, some, as it were, in the heart of the Grand Man, some in the head, so as to speak, some in the lungs, some in the hands. The incredible thing is that we have all been created to perform a use and find a place in the Grand Man, which is heaven. There we shall be as the countless cells in the human body, each of us needed and each of us uniquely equipped to serve just where we will be. There is a place there waiting for us and prepared for us. The question is whether we shall have sufficiently prepared ourselves to take it.

"The universal haven before the Lord is", we read, "as one Man". (*Apocalypse Explained* 1115(5)). And, "All are distinguished and are assigned a place in the Grand Man according to the quality of good present with them, both in general and in particular". (*Arcana Caelestia* 7236). "The heart of the Grand Man, that is, of Heaven, is constituted of those who are in love to the Lord and the neighbour.... The lungs in the Grand Man, or in Heaven, are constituted of those who from the Lord are in charity.... and thence in faith". (*Arcana Caelestia* 9276(6))

The particular abilities and capacities we have are one thing. Another, as we have just seen, is the state of regeneration we have reached - where we are and how we stand spiritually. In the absence of regeneration, and based on a life we chose to live only for our selfish pleasure, advancement and gratification, whatever our abilities and capacities may be, we are not qualified even to enter heaven and take our place there.

The teaching bears repeating that every person has been created by the Lord to serve a use in heaven, for which he or she will be uniquely equipped and fitted, to all eternity. At the same time it's up to us to make sure we are fit people to go to heaven in the first place. Each one there has a part to play. Everyone is needed. We therefore affirm the worth of each individual, and each individual rightly affirms his or her own worth. Not that any credit or glory reflects on the individual person. All the glory and credit is the Lord's. For it is He who created us this way. It is He who gives life its whole point and purpose. And if we do anything of real value and service for others we do it from Him and because He has used us in that capacity. We do not do it from ourselves.

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