

## Individuality

A question that relates to our creativity as Christians is, "Are we able to retain our individuality as Christians?" Asking this question another way, "Does submitting our will to God mean that we have to lose our identity or personality?" To those who would answer yes to this question, I presume they envision a heaven of saved who have been purified of their 'self' and cannot be distinguished one from the other because they are all exactly just like Christ. I don't think that this is the way that God meant for it to be. Just try to imagine a world where everybody is just alike! Try to imagine meeting someone who in every detail is exactly like you! Do you think that you would get along?

This sounds like some of the eastern religions, which are based on the loss of the personality of the individual, who becomes 'one' with the universe. He is like a drop of water that is added to an existing ocean, without even making much of a ripple. It is true that we should pale into insignificance in comparison with the majesty of God and his message, but we must not be too quick to assume that we are to have no personality at all. For instance, though John the Baptist's main mission was to be a 'voice,' he was very much of a character. We find that he "wore a garment of camel's hair, and a leather girdle around his waist; and his food was locusts and wild honey." (Matthew 3:4) Many of the prophets and workers of God exhibited strong personalities in addition to delivering the powerful word of God.

We must remember that God created our personalities. And the tremendous variety that we represent can certainly be encompassed by the infinite nature of God. W.B. Yeats has said that every soul is unique, and that no other can satisfy the same need in God. He created us to be ourselves, within the constraints of the laws that he has given. We must remember that God loves us individually, and not just mankind in general. This means that the crucifixion applies to us personally, and that God deals with us personally. This ought to make us feel great about ourselves.

It is important to note that, when we look back at the parable of the talents, the Lord did not tell his servants exactly what to do with the money that he had given them. He did not give them investment advice because he wanted them to use their own ideas; in other words, he wanted them to be creative about it. He does show the unworthy servant how he could have made a good return on the money, but he wanted him to have figured that out for himself.

The type of inspiration which God has used also points to God's endorsement of the personality of his followers. God allowed the personality of the writer to show through in their works, even though they carry the weight and authority of the word of God. This is best seen in the four gospels, which each tell basically the same story, but each has a little bit of a personal flavor contributed by each author. We must emphasize that this personality must never compete with God's, try to overshadow him, or keep our wills from submitting to His, but must glorify God in every way.

Without personality and creativity, we are in great danger of becoming what Ray Marcrom has called "Franchise Christians." Just as McDonald's and other fast food chains put out the same type of sandwiches every day, with no variation, so our congregations and Christian schools may be in danger of turning out a dull, lifeless, assembly line type product. These "franchise Christians" are told what to believe, and they accept it, not because they really believe it, but because it is easier to absorb it without really thinking about it. They just repeat what they have had programmed into them. I fear that we are producing only surface Christians, who have no real depth of feeling or belief. God thirsts for our individual, personal love and commitment, and he will not be satisfied without it.

There is one franchise fast food chain that does offer a difference, which is more like what we have been needing in the church, and that is the chain that advertises as their strong point, "Have it your way." The point here, is, that the product is still unquestionably a hamburger, that is it bears the fundamental characteristics of being a true hamburger. But one can have a little variety, in choosing different flavorings that accompany it. In the same vein, what the church produces must always be in all respects a Christian, but the spice of personality needs to be there, too. We of course must always be true to the fundamentals of the faith.

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