

One out of Many

FRANCIS M. GIBBONS

We are all alike, and yet so very different. This truth reflects one of the most unusual aspects of the Creation, that there should be such wide diversity in the midst of apparent uniformity. For example, as I look out over this vast audience, it is impossible for me to differentiate among the sea of faces. It reminds me somewhat of the jest of one of our Japanese friends who said, “The trouble with you Occidentals is that you all look alike.”

But if I were to dismount the stand and walk toward the back of the building, as I drew near, the differences would be readily apparent in the quantity, the shade, and the texture of the hair; differences in the depth and color of the eye; in the shape of the face and the figure. But these and many other physical differences readily apparent to the naked eye do not begin to tell the story of the special distinction each of us has.

We learn, for example, that there are no two sets of fingerprints exactly alike. Thus, of the billions of people who have lived, who now live, or who may yet live, each has a special identifying mark at the tips of his fingers; wherever one goes without gloves, he leaves a trail that can be readily followed by another with the requisite skill and patience. The

burglar, for instance, who enters my home under the cloak of night, believing his presence there will never be detected, is surprised to learn we have placed him inside the house because of a thumbprint he carelessly left on a piece of furniture.

And, we are told, each of us who writes has a different style from all others. Our voices are different, too. The differences in timbre, in tone, in volume, in inflection, in cadence, all make it possible for us to identify someone on the telephone without ever having heard the name mentioned. But again, these and other physical differences not visible to the eye still do not tell the full story, for there is within each of us a spirit that preexisted earth life, that stands apart from all others.

Abraham was shown the spirits that existed before the world was, and he was identified as being one of them. There were, therefore, special qualities in his character, appearance, and demeanor that made him stand out from all

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others. As it was with Abraham in the pre-mortal existence, so it was with each of us. Each was a standout. Each was different. And these differences in spiritual attributes exist today and are reflected in our attitudes and conduct. So, you sisters, the next time your sweetheart says there is no one like you in the whole world, believe him, because it is true.

An Interesting Cycle

In mortality, most of us pass through an interesting cycle, oscillating from individuality to uniformity and back to individuality again. The newborn baby is highly individualistic. Ordinarily, he is set up in a special room, the nursery, from which he controls and directs the activities of the household. Eating and sleeping schedules are arranged around the whims or the needs of the baby. You must curry his favor. He will not seek yours. Occasionally he may bestow upon you a passing glance or a fleeting smile, the last as often as not arising from his gastritis as from any special interest in you. So, the king reigns supreme.

But the time comes when His Majesty is toppled from his throne. With an oldest child, this usually happens when number two makes an appearance. It does not take long to discover that this unwanted stranger who has begun to monopolize the time of his court is not merely a visitor, but a permanent resident. Later, his status and influence are further diluted when he begins to attend church and school. Then follows a period when the child's individuality is submerged and he yearns to look, to act, and to talk just like his peers.

How well I remember in the first grade in St. Johns, Arizona, that just as regularly as my mother sent me to school with combed hair, just as regularly would I mess it up when I was out of her sight. It was not an act of rebellion, nor of disrespect. It was an act of survival. For you see, at that time and that place, the accepted grooming standard for boys was

disheveled hair; you cannot begin to imagine the burden that would have been laid upon me had I gone to school with combed hair and the name Francis Marion.

Later, in high school in Phoenix, combed hair was in, and so were saddle oxfords and argyle socks and corduroys. It was only on rare occasions that we ventured out of this uniform. I have observed the same phenomenon in my own children and their friends. Indeed, we wondered a few years ago whether the clothiers had discontinued manufacturing any kind of jacket except the blue Windbreaker. And then, for a while, quilted jackets were very much in vogue.

But there comes a time when the maturing adult wishes to set his own individual tastes and preferences. Parents may know their daughter has reached or is fast approaching this stage when she announces one day that she will never again wear her new dress, for she has seen someone else wearing one exactly like it. She will insist that the dress be returned, or passed on as a hand-me-down, or given to the D.I. And if, as a last resort, it is to be kept, then it surely must be altered or dyed.

One of the finest things that came out of the decade of the sixties was the trend toward and the emphasis upon individuality. This was reflected in the catchphrase "Do your own thing" and in Paul Anka's lyrics, "I did it my way." But that generation did not originate this idea. It is as old as the human race, even much older. At other times, it was expressed in other, perhaps more eloquent language.

It was precisely this idea that worked such a change in the attitudes and accomplishments of President David O. McKay. You will remember that at one point during his mission in the British Isles as a young man, he reached a point of discouragement when he felt inept and unproductive. In the midst of this despondency, he saw, one day, inscribed on a stone over the entryway of a building, the phrase, "What e'er thou art, act well thy part." This

short statement brought home to him a great truth he had not previously understood: It matters little where we serve or in what capacity. What does matter is how we serve.

Individuality and Unity

I am always intrigued by the examples of men and women who, in their conduct, manifest that they have made peace with themselves, have accepted themselves for what they are, have ceased trying to be someone they are not, and whose object and purpose in life is to be the best of what they are or what they may become. Especially intriguing to me is the character reflected in the encounter (perhaps legendary) between the philosopher Diogenes and young Alexander the Great. According to the report that has come down to us, Alexander saw Diogenes one day at the roadside talking to a group of disciples. Impressed by his demeanor and the careful attention of his audience, Alexander stopped to listen and, listening, became a disciple himself. At length he mustered enough courage to ask the philosopher, "Is there any way I can serve you?" The answer that has come down through the centuries was quite unexpected. Said Diogenes, "Yes. You can stand out of my sunshine." While we may wish that the answer had been a little more kindly and a little less arrogant, we cannot help but admire the sense of independence and self-confidence it imparted.

Another example closer to our time and place of another philosopher, from an entirely different mold, is that of Eric Hoffer. By choice this man earned a livelihood all his adult life as a day laborer, usually as a longshoreman. He said this mode of employment gave him more time to think and reflect and did not divert his attention unduly from the thing that meant the most to him. In submitting his first manuscript to a publisher, he mailed his only copy, written in his own handwriting. When a friend expressed shock at this, he

explained that the original was recorded upon his mind, verbatim; he had reflected so long on the subject he knew it by heart. His character and methods are clearly revealed by an incident that occurred as he worked setting out tomato plants. He became so intrigued with the question "Why do the roots of the plant grow down and the branches shoot up?" that he quit immediately, demanded his pay, and went directly to a library, where he began an exhaustive study of botany and biology. He learned sentence structure and writing style by reading and rereading the works of Montaigne. While his methods and lifestyle were unorthodox, we must admire and should emulate his example of self-confidence and individuality.

Still another example, closer to home, is that of Elder Richard L. Evans, deceased, formerly of the Twelve, who for many years was the voice of the Spoken Word on Temple Square. Several years ago, in attending a conference in the Salt Lake Bonneville Stake, he brought with him detailed instructions about a new program. Realizing his words on administrative matters would carry little weight because of his sketchy experience in that field, he reviewed the material in the most brief way and explained that the handout he intended to leave behind would provide the details. He then made this comment, which I have never forgotten: "I know what I am. I am a microphonist and a pulpiteer."

There comes a time in each life when one must accept himself for what he is, must accept the role that time and circumstance have imposed upon him, and must begin to work and to grow in the place where he has been planted. There comes a time when one must realize that imitation is suicide and that the failure to develop innate talents and abilities is, in truth, a rejection both of the god who made him and of the earthly parents who gave him birth and nourished him.

A fundamental objective in the premortal existence, in the creation of the U.S. Constitution, and in the teachings of the Church is to nourish and encourage our innate capacities and abilities. The rejection of Satan’s plan of compulsion in the premortal existence once and for all affirmed the right of freedom of choice, the right of self-determination, the right to follow wherever our talents and inclination might lead us. The assertion in the Declaration of Independence that we are endowed by our Creator with certain inalienable rights—life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness—reaffirms that concept. And that affirmation is seen again in the modern revelation that we ought not to be commanded in all things, that we should bring to pass much righteousness by the acts of our own free will because “The power is in us” (see D&C 58:28). So, the mandate of God in the premortal existence, through earthly prophets and through wise men raised up for that purpose, is that we should be individuals, that we should develop our God-given talents, and that we should follow the path indicated by our own special qualities and talents.

But while in one breath we admonish our people to develop their individuality, while we urge them toward an endless diversity, in the very next breath we enjoin upon them the need for unity, the need to be one. We remind them of the heavenly mandate “If ye are not one ye are not mine” (D&C 38:27). And by way of confirmation, we cite the injunctions of our leaders like Brigham Young and J. Reuben Clark. The essence of this unity is found in Christ’s admonition to his disciples that they should be one, even as he and his father are one. It is found also in the motto to be found on our paper currency: *E Pluribus Unum*—“one out of many.” Thus, this mandate does not envision any loss of individuality or separate identity. It merely contemplates a unity in purpose, a unity in objective, a unity in observing those principles

that lead to perfection and that insure freedom that protects the rights of individuality.

President Spencer W. Kimball gave emphasis to these two different yet complementary principles. His first public statement after becoming President of the Church enjoined its members to a unity, a unity in observing the principles of the gospel. Later, in the *Ensign*, he enjoined the members of the Church to seek diversity, to develop individual talents. Said the prophet:

In our world, there have risen brilliant stars in drama, music, literature, sculpture, painting, science and all the graces. For long years I have had a vision of [members of the Church] greatly increasing [their] already strong position of excellence till the eyes of all the world will be upon us.

*President John Taylor so prophesied, as he emphasized his words with this directive: “You mark my words, and write them down and see if they do not come to pass. You will see the day that Zion will be far ahead of the outside world in everything pertaining to learning of every kind as we are today in regard to religious matters. God expects Zion to become the praise and glory of the whole earth, so that kings hearing of her fame will come and gaze upon her glory.” [Education for Eternity, Brigham Young University Speeches of the Year (Provo: 12 September 1967), pp. 12–13; this talk was excerpted in “The Gospel Vision of the Arts,” *Ensign*, July 1977, pp. 2–5]*

A Pearl Without Price

As we contemplate the vision of these prophets, each of us must ask, “How can I develop to the fullest extent the inherent talents and abilities I possess?” In answering, we must recognize that everything begins within ourselves, within our own minds, for in earth life it is in the mind that all things originate.

I never cease to marvel at the complexities and the power of the human mind. I was reminded of this recently when, in a restaurant, I heard a voice from behind call my name and

say, "Hello." I turned to look upon a man who, at first glance, appeared to be a stranger, but who in a moment I recognized as an old friend from long ago almost hidden behind the mask of his advancing years. With that recognition, his name came to mind, along with mental images of the circumstances under which we had first met and of incidents that had passed between us thereafter. This whole episode did not take more than a few seconds and was triggered by the visual image that passed from the eye to the brain—all else was automatic. But the marvelous retrieval system of the human mind is actuated not only by visual impulses, but also by sounds and by smells, by tastes and by touch.

I never, for example, smell a certain brand of hand soap but that there appears on the screen of memory the picture of a washstand just off my grandmother's kitchen, where she always kept a bar of the same kind of soap. Nor do I ever smell the intermixed odors of a fruit and vegetable stand but I see in my mind's eye a grocery store in Phoenix, Arizona, where I worked as a teenager. And I never smell or hear a UTA bus but that I envision a ship in the Pacific on whose decks were stacked numerous small craft whose motors emitted sounds and smells exactly like Salt Lake's buses.

Scientists tell us that the human brain comprises billions of microscopic cells interconnected by an elaborate nervous system; it is here that the numberless facts, figures, and images of a lifetime are stored efficiently, waiting to be called forth by an experience of the kind I have just described. As far as we know, there is no limit to the storage capacity of a normal, healthy, vigorous brain.

But its use as an incomparable memory bank is not the only function of the mind. The cognitive part of it also has the power to analyze, to compare, to differentiate, to make predictions based upon known facts—almost the power to create new facts. If, for example, I were to see my neighbor at a commencement exercise and

were to note the name of his son on the list of graduates, my mind would automatically conclude that my neighbor was there to see his son graduate. Beginning with elementary operations of this kind, the mind moves on to evermore complex and sophisticated operations to produce marvelous results.

All we see about us, except those things that are part of God's natural creation, sprang from the human mind. The beautiful and functional building in which we are sitting, all of its furnishings, the clothing we wear, the jewelry that adorns our bodies, all these originated in a human mind. Outside stand our automobiles, and at home the garages that house them. Huge, floating cities ply the sea-lanes, and beneath them cruise sophisticated atomic-powered submarines. Overhead fly ponderous airplanes that almost seem to defy the law of gravity. And beyond them are our satellites and spaceships. All these similarly had their origin in someone's brain.

And this is not to mention our literary, our musical, and our artistic productions. Nor, again, the special speculations of our scientists and philosophers, all of which came from that same prolific source: the human mind.

In light of all this, we are led to exclaim that the human brain is not merely a pearl of great price: It is a pearl without price, for there is no amount of wealth, no human intelligence, or ingenuity that can replace or restore the mind once it has been destroyed or seriously damaged. And against this background, is it not strange that so little careful attention is given to the maintenance, the cultivation, and the use of the human brain?

We take so much for granted. Anyone seriously interested in the proper maintenance of the mind must of necessity begin with the body in which it is housed. Generally speaking, it is not possible for a mind to function above the level of the health and vigor of the body that houses it. They are too intermingled to differentiate. Thus, the mind partakes of both the

strengths and the weaknesses of the body housing it.

Blessed are the Latter-day Saints who have revelations direct from God about the maintenance of the body. The Word of Wisdom, for example, gives us the do's and don'ts of proper diet. We are enjoined to eat fruits and vegetables freely in season; to use the whole grains; to be sparing in our use of meat; to abstain from the use of tea, coffee, tobacco, and narcotics, or, in fact, of anything else deemed detrimental to health. It has always been a mystery to me that otherwise intelligent and rational people persist in taking into their bodies substances that weaken and debilitate them and that, in turn, blunt the delicate and irreplaceable instrument of the mind.

Some of you may have read of the report of an interview with a health specialist who said that if a man owned a million-dollar horse and regularly gave it a cup of coffee, a doughnut, and a cigarette for breakfast, he would probably be reported to the Humane Society.

While it is doubtful that few if any in this audience eat breakfasts of this kind, it is likely that many eat breakfasts with little more nutritional value and regularly starve their bodies.

But a perfectly healthy mind in a vigorous, healthy body can be disabled by factors originating within the mind itself, or within the spirit the body houses. These are usually rooted in feelings of fear or guilt that can be of such intensity as to almost paralyze the mind in its natural operations. I am acquainted with a professional man who, without any apparent physical defect, became listless, remote, and abstracted, and almost wholly incapable of carrying on his thriving practice. It was learned later that this paralysis was caused by guilt feelings growing out of a serious moral transgression he had committed. It was not until he recognized the root cause and had done what was necessary to remedy it that he found relief. Most of us are aware of circumstances where a person has been rendered almost completely

immobile because of fear. It is significant to Latter-day Saints that the antidotes for these two disabling emotions are to be found in the first principles of the gospel—faith and repentance. We conquer fear with faith and guilt with repentance.

A healthy mind in a vigorous body, released from the shackles of fear and guilt, is ready to be cultivated; and that term is used with precision here because of the analogy to the cultivation of land. We must never forget that the law of the harvest applies to our minds as it does to our farm. If we sow deadly nightshade on the farm, we will reap nightshade, not onions or tomatoes. If we sow our minds with vulgarity, pornography, and evil thoughts, so will the harvest be of such. President J. Reuben Clark, who has provided us with an excellent criterion for what we ought or ought not to read, said he did not intend to read anything he did not wish to remember through eternity.

Since most people spend the lion's share of their lives in the search for bread—that is, in getting the means necessary to maintain life—it behooves us to fill our minds with all available knowledge about our businesses and professions so as to enable us to do our work in less time and with greater skill and profit, thereby leaving us more leisure.

But life not only should be habitable, it should be enjoyable. Our leisure should be spent, in part, filling our minds with ideas and concepts that will enable us to develop our latent artistic, literary, musical, athletic, and other talents for our enjoyment and benefit and for the blessing of others. If we use it correctly, the mind can be a great resource against boredom and loneliness in old age or in times of illness or isolation. I have been impressed by the statement of Elder LeGrand Richards, who told his bedridden wife, "Mama, the Lord gave us memory so we can smell the roses in December."

The mind can also serve as a shield against danger or transgression in the future. If we will

think of the possible dangers or temptations we may face in the future and will now devise steps to be taken at that time best calculated to guard us, our minds, programmed as it were for that purpose, will come to our rescue and help provide needed protection.

But the highest and most important use of the mind is to lead us to peace in this life and exaltation in the world to come. We may hope to attain these goals by filling our minds with the holy scriptures, by living according to their precepts, and by having the Spirit of the Lord with us.

Meanwhile, we should use our minds and our wills to live lives of joy and achievement. There are many in the audience who have vast, untapped talents and abilities. We urge you not to delay in taking positive steps to develop them.

Let me share with you more of the vision of President Spencer W. Kimball about your future. He said:

With regard to masters, surely there must be many Wagners . . . in the [Church], approaching him or yet to come in the tomorrows—young people with love of art, talent supreme, and eagerness to create. I hope we . . . may produce men greater than this German composer, Wagner, but less eccentric, more spiritual. . . . [p. 13]

If we strive for perfection, the best and greatest, and are never satisfied with mediocrity, we can

excel. In the field of both composition and performance, why cannot [someone] write a greater oratorio than Handel's "Messiah?" . . . [p. 14]

Oh, how our world needs statesmen! And we ask again with George Bernard Shaw, "Why not?" We have the raw material, we have the facilities, we can excel in training. We have the spiritual climate. We must train statesmen, not demagogues; men of integrity, not weaklings who for a mess of pottage will sell their birthright. . . .

For years I have been waiting for someone to do justice in recording in song and story and painting and sculpture the story of the restoration, . . . the struggles . . . and inner revolutions and counterrevolutions of those first decades. [Education for Eternity, p. 18]

I personally have the feeling that some of those whom President Kimball saw are seated here before me, and to you, especially, I would address this final admonition in the words of the writer, Thomas Carlyle:

Produce! Produce! Were it but the pitifullest, infinitesimal fraction of a product, produce it in God's name. It is the utmost thou hast in thee. Out with it then. Up, up. Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy whole might. Work while it is called today, for the night cometh when no man can work.

I say this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.