

# Sorted

By Jonathan Mutton

“Dad, can you help me with my homework?” (Ah, you already know I’m male, not a DINKY and probably Gen X.) “I don’t understand what I’m expected to do: we have to write about all the different coloured people; my teacher says that red people react and have feelings for what they see.” I turn round from the computer and start fiddling with a data stick.

“I know what you’re going to do now, you’re going to give me a lecture, you always fiddle with something when you’re explaining something.” “There you are, you react to what you see,” I reply. “Yes but everybody does.”

“No it probably means you are a red type of person, we don’t all react emotionally to what we see, that’s the point; we’re all different.”

The first task we were given to do was name everything and we are still at it. God asked us to name all the animals. The sorting continues, only with most of our attention on us; we have got to know ourselves quite well after all this time. Psychometric testing is used to sort potential employees from those who wouldn’t fit what you wanted them to do. Professor McGonagal has a sorting hat while other teachers use learning styles to help form lesson plans. And speaking of hats, we are red, yellow, black, green, blue, or white; my son, aged ten is being taught Edward de Bono’s thinking skills theory. It is one of many ways of assessing our team type. From colours to letters, Y.U.P.P.I.E., D.I.N.K.Y., S.I.N.B.A.D., C.H.A.V., then 16 combinations of I or E, S or N, F or T and J or P that make up the Myers Briggs Type Indicators.

We can also be arranged by what are sometimes called the seven redemptive gifts of prophet, servant, teacher, exhorter, giver, ruler and mercy giver; all very helpful for self understanding. How about The Five Love Languages, different ways we like to be loved? We can add to the mix ethnicity, caste or class standing, upbringing, education, generational experience, sexual orientation, marital status, age, intelligence, political persuasion; an anthropologist’s dream.

We spend a lot of time sorting out who’s best, who needs help, who could do better, from GCSEs to professional exams and the local football league to the Olympics, or this year’s Rugby World Cup; elaborate ways of classifying humans into winners and losers.

And then there is gender Women and Men, Mars or Venus, equal and different....ahhh, why can’t we just be people?

Why did God ask us to do this? Is it because the animals needed to know what they were to answer to, Millie, Arnie, Oscar, and Scrappy Doogle? Or because He couldn’t think up any names for himself? What happens when we name something?

First we have to think about it; every new parent spends hours thinking about what to call their child, well mostly (lists can be found in books or Hello magazine). I have been told that Jonathan was the name of a childhood friend my mum had who sadly drowned when he was ten; Peyton my middle name, was the surname of a distant relative who was a barmaid in Shrewsbury. Mum chose it in case I wanted to use

another name instead of - Mutton (haggard old sheep) which describes the fact that the other half of my family were sheep farmers in Cornwall.

Names given to pets, houses, streets, churches, ships, businesses, cars, communities all say something about that thing, but also the person or people who have named it. We have been required to take time valuing and considering, giving thought to what that person or thing is all about.

The huge range of human diversity is to be celebrated. Announcing the new South African president Nelson Mandela in 1994, Desmond Tutu said "We of many cultures, languages and races have become one nation. We are the Rainbow People of God."<sup>1</sup> God has placed something unique and amazing in each individual. We are to appreciate and listen to our varied expressions of our personalities and gender and our stories.

If we want to change the world, we need to start valuing it and celebrating it in all its incredible diversity.

Having sorted, ordered and pigeonholed everybody (INFP, Team player, Teacher) we are however in grave danger of making assumptions, for we are not robots that are programmed to particular equations. And this is where everyone gets riled, cos I'm me, not a series of letters or numbers, someone who is, has a soul, does my own thing, and thinks my own thoughts; possibly in a predictable way but they are mine.

Sorting has been used for destructive purposes. Ethnic cleansing and discrimination continue through the policies of the likes of Hendrik Verwoerd and Jonathan Mutton. We discriminate against those who are not like us, and especially those who are only just not like us; this is due to the effort involved and the perceived threat to our own identity. We make short hand assessments, quickly pigeon holing people and totally failing to meet the God-created person. The result is that people are undervalued, misinterpreted, ignored and despised; this leads to prisons over subscribed with disproportionate sections of the community and ghettos but also the simple social clique.

Sorting only helps us so far. We need to move from talking about us as a God-created species with the initial task of naming to our purpose, which is to have a relationship with God. It is as His dearly loved children that He wants to know us and for each of us to know each other, siblings; you and me, His dearly loved children.

*Jonathan Mutton is a member of the Incarnate Network steering group, a member at North Winchester Community Church, until recently working for Kids Church in Andover.*

---

<sup>1</sup> Tutu, Desmond, *The Rainbow People of God*. (p 261)