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**Emanuel Swedenborg** wrote extensively on the humanity of God. Here are two short extracts:

*God is supremely human; and every person is therefore human in the measure of his reception of love and wisdom.*

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*Nothing whatever in the created universe is substance and form in itself, or life in itself, or love and wisdom in itself, indeed neither is the human being human in himself, but all is from God, who is human in Himself, wisdom and love in itself, and form and substance in itself.*

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# The Humanity of God



# The Humanity of God

How can we talk about the humanity of God – surely God is Divine and people are human? But is this really true or are we simply misunderstanding the nature of God?

To try to answer these questions we need to start with what 'humanity' means or to put it another way, what it means to be 'human'. Now sometimes it is a lot easier to explain what a word means by describing its opposite and then coming back to the original word. So instead of thinking about 'humanity' or 'human' try to think a moment about 'inhumanity' or 'inhuman'.

Immediately all sorts of events and situations come to mind when we think about inhumanity – the holocaust, war, poverty, the slave trade, terrorism, racism - and so many more examples of the inhuman way people treat other people. And then there are the words we use to describe such treatment – cruelty, barbarity, atrocity, intolerance, hatred, indifference – the list could go on and on. Thus to be inhuman is to feel, think and act in one's own interests only and against the interests of others - all the way from mere indifference to total barbarity.

Now to be 'human' or to have real 'humanity' we need the opposite of the things mentioned above – we need care, kindness, compassion, mercy, love, wisdom, understanding, tolerance – and much more. The application of these qualities in life leads to the desire to help rescue people from the inhuman conditions in which they live and to promote mutual interdependency between people regardless of race colour or creed. And achieving these aims requires not just love but the wisdom to know how to apply that love. And this surely is what real 'humanity' is all about. Thus to be human is to feel, think and act in the interest of others and without concern for one's own interests - all the way from a simple act of kindness to a lifelong caring for others.

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Being human then is not about having a body, head, arms and legs, brain, lungs and blood. It is about putting love and wisdom into action as we express in life a real compassion for others.

But now we have to ask ourselves where these 'human' qualities come from.

If we believe in God – a creative Divine Source to our life - then surely the Divine nature must contain within itself the source of our truly 'human' qualities albeit at a level of perfection we can scarcely imagine. So, if we can express in some imperfect way love and compassion for others this 'human' love must spring from God's love - an unconditional love that has no limits and no boundaries and is shared equally with all. And a similar principal applies to all the qualities that make up true humanity.

And this is why we can talk about the 'Humanity of God' – because those qualities of love and wisdom which in us make us truly human first arise perfectly in God. God is truly Human and we are only really human when we reflect God's image and likeness into the world around us.

Karl Barth, the influential theologian of the mid-decades of the 20th century, wrote the following in his book on 'The Humanity of God':

*God requires no exclusion of humanity, no non-humanity, not to speak of inhumanity, in order to be truly God. But we may and must, however, look further and recognise the fact that actually His deity encloses humanity in itself.*

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