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Are There Any Questions?  
Strategies for the Journey of Faith

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## Are There Any Questions? Strategies for the Journey of Faith

Imagine beginning a class by showing a Pepsi commercial. One of Pepsi's ad campaigns featured Ray Charles and a trio of beautiful women who magically appeared to people in exotic locales. It was built around the hook of "un-huh," the inflection of which carries infinite meanings—at least according to Pepsi. The star quality of Ray Charles, combined with a catchy background beat, more than a touch of sex, and some dazzling effects all added up to one of Pepsi's most successful campaigns.

Here is a golden opportunity to examine, in a classroom, the values of a consumer society and hold them up to critical thinking. So we play the commercial once, twice, without speaking in between.

Then we ask the students to describe in one-word answers drawn from a list that is supplied, the emotions they experienced on seeing the ad. Next, we ask them to describe what they believe Pepsi's ad agency wants them to believe and to do, having seen the commercial.

That can lead into a discussion of truth and how we judge it. Whose standards do we use to judge the value of beauty, of success, of style? The Bible comes into play here in Jesus' words about gaining the whole world and losing one's own soul. Aristotle's aesthetics, literary theory, philosophical arguments about value stream together.

The discussion can go several different directions from this point. One direction we might pursue is the idea that behind every sales pitch is a strategy of manipulation and perhaps even of distortion of the truth. We might continue by noting how TV and film often give us the easy answers, instead of reflecting the reality that value is hard to come by and that most often we have to give up some things in order to gain the pearl of great price.

T. S. Eliot's poem, "The Journey of the Magi" comes to mind in which the birth that the Magi experienced was "Hard and bitter agony for us/like Death, our death. We returned to our places/these Kingdoms/But no longer at ease here/in the old dispensation/With an alien people clutching their gods. I should be glad of another death."

That is a natural tie-in to Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship*, to Tolstoy's *Confession*, to St. Augustine's *Confessions*, and a host of other sources on discipleship, sacrifice, service and walking in the way of the kingdom of God.

### Introduction

The purpose of education is not the transmission of knowledge—as important as that might be—but to learn how to learn in all circumstances of life.

"How do we get Christ into the classroom?" is a question often posed to Christian teachers. It betrays a misunderstanding of the relation of faith and learning in the classroom, one that regards spiritual matters as something tacked on, almost as an afterthought. Is faith an ingredient to be added to the recipe or is it an intrinsic principle that works from the inside out? When we "do" faith isn't

that an active verb, not just a concept? When we “do” faith in the classroom does it arise from our own experience or is it just a knee-jerk autonomic reflex to a sense of compulsion or to an external authority?

### I. Why Should We Do Faith?

One of the most significant moments in the Gospel story occurs when Jesus asks his disciples in Mark 8 who people are saying that he is. They give the conventional answers, Elijah, John the Baptist, one of the prophets—and finally he asks “Who do *you* say that I am?” That question is one we can ask our students in a variety of ways and in a variety of classes. In asking ourselves and our students who we think Jesus is we bring to focus a whole matrix of experiences and ideas that impinge upon faith and learning.

In Mark 8 we discover that in gaining the whole world we run the risk of losing our true self. I believe that one purpose for doing faith in the classroom is to enable people to find their true self. To provide the environment in which they can learn to trust enough to take up their cross and follow Christ.

A second purpose for doing faith in the classroom is to learn what communication can mean in a variety of situations. Communication, by one definition, is really about subverting the forces that separate and divide people and instead learning to bring about reconciliation between those estranged through differences of race, gender, ethnicity, culture, economics and religion. To speak in explicitly Christian terms:

If we are united with Christ, there is a new world; the old order has gone, and a new order has already begun. From first to last this has been the work of God. He has reconciled us to himself through Christ, and he has enlisted us in this service of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:17,18, NEB).

Teaching affords an opportunity to extend the frontiers of reconciliation and to redraw the maps of human relationships. As we learn to communicate we also learn to cherish the differences between people; the very things that can drive a wedge between groups and societies can also become the occasion for deeper and stronger reconciliation and understanding.

The ultimate goal of a Christian education is “to be strong to grasp, with all God’s people, what is the breadth and length and height and depth of the love of Christ, and to know it, although it is beyond knowledge. So may you attain to fullness of being, the fullness of God himself (Eph. 3:18,19, NEB).” In creating a community in which people can trust each other enough to struggle with important issues, we create opportunities for people to realize and live from the fullness of God within them.

### II. Questioning as Mapping the Future of Faith

A fundamental assumption in pedagogy is the importance of asking questions. Yet, for many Adventists, asking critical questions of religion is a kind of betrayal of faith, evidence that the questioner doesn’t really believe in the promises of the Bible. Sometimes when Adventist teachers attempt to integrate faith and learning in the classroom, they encounter opposition to any probing of the roots of faith or the sources of Biblical teachings or even the legitimacy of philosophical enquiry.

Some of this concern is no doubt valid; no one wants to have been responsible for destroying a young person’s inherited faith without providing some means for regeneration. None of us have the right—especially teachers, with their considerable perceived authority—to play with another person’s mind out of some misplaced sense of intellectual rigor. More often than not, such attempts to jump-start a student’s intellectual and spiritual engines are merely for the ego-gratification of the teacher.

But shouldn’t a teacher teach students how to deal with critical issues concerning faith? Shouldn’t we attempt to jar students loose from their comfortable moorings in the

hope that they will begin to claim their faith and tradition as their own? Aren't there methods of teaching, through judicious questioning and other means, that are both conducive to active learning and respectful of a student's freedom of choice? The answer to all these questions is a qualified "Yes!"—qualified because as teachers and perhaps as unwitting or unwilling spiritual mentors we have the power to help or deeply hurt our students.

Surely "faith seeking understanding" (in Anselm's phrase) is a legitimate way to do Christian education. Under that rubric we can think of different methods of creating a context in which critical inquiry, faith, and understanding can develop. I'd like to examine two general models of teaching from within a theoretical communication framework, to discover how they might facilitate critical thinking and learning. First, we'll look at a form of questioning I call mapping,<sup>1</sup> and secondly, we'll look at two types of persuasion that can be effective within the classroom, Muzaffer Sherif's "Social Judgment-Involvement Theory," and Milton Rokeach's "Belief Hierarchy."

### Questioning and Mapping

As teachers, what kinds of questions do we have at our disposal for opening up discussions? Questions are rhetorical devices used to retrieve and package old information and to elicit a response concerning new information. Teachers most often use questions as a means of *retrieving* previously owned information, less often as a means of *uncovering* information, and least often as a means of *constructing* new information. But all three of these forms of questioning are crucial to the learning process and to the social construction of reality.

We might also think of questions and questioning as a form of mapping a journey in a certain direction. When we read a map we are working with a symbolic representation of real places. A map is useful to us only if it is accurate in its representation of locations and objects. A map is a *report* of a place, a second-hand representation of a place we may never have been to but wish to visit. Naturally, we rely on the mapmakers to give us the facts as they have accurately interpreted them. But we also realize that the map is not the territory and that there is a qualitative difference between the symbol (map) and the reality (the territory).

This is the realm of general semantical theory, which says that we live in two worlds: the *experiential* world made up of that which we directly experience, and the *verbal* world which comes to us through words and through oral and written reports from other people. The experiential world is relatively small for most of us. For example, I have never been to Japan, thus my experience of it is not first-hand. If I could only accept that which I had directly experienced then Japan would not exist for me. But I rely on the verbal reports of others who have been there. They draw me maps of the place and I read them. Through comparing maps and talking to Japanese people or others who have visited Japan I build up a map in my head which enables me to be fairly knowledgeable in my understanding of that culture.

Then one fine day I actually go to Japan. Now I'm traveling through the land, hoping my verbal world of maps and reports bears a striking resemblance to what I'm actually experiencing. If it does, I can get around pretty well; if there is little congruence I'm going to be constantly perplexed. But this is the point: even the best of maps is only a partial representation of the territory. The first principle governing such symbols is this:

The symbol		the thing symbolized
The map	IS NOT	the territory
The word		the thing <sup>2</sup>

With that in mind we can employ a form of questioning which leads students to uncover the maps which can then lead them to the territory. Or to put it another way:

by entering the verbal world through means of questions students may enter the experiential world for themselves.

Why not just hand our students our maps and send them off on their journey? It would be quicker, more efficient, and might even save money. But effective educating means taking the journey with our students. Sometimes we lead, sometimes we walk along beside, but we don't abandon them nor do we pamper them.

Most teachers can read a map, that is, interpret other people's maps. But teachers also *construct* maps—if they are conscientious, fearless, and take the time. The challenge of mapmaking is two-fold: to create a map that is consistent with reality in general and yet is a *bona fide* new map. For the Christian, that is also how faith lives and grows in practical experience.

One way to do mapmaking is to employ four types of questions. The first is the *initiatory* question which asks, "What do we know?" The second is the *exploratory* question which asks, "What *can* we know?" The third is a *focusing* question: "What *should* we know and why?", and the last is a question of *praxis*, "What should we do with our new knowledge?"

The Christian teacher can engage the class in this sort of mapmaking because the underlying assumption of his or her pedagogy is that we should put our knowledge to the test. Part of faith is the conviction that truth is one, that we see different facets of it, and that it is our responsibility to sift and integrate our experience. These questions, then, become the means through which we shape our experience or the experiences of others into a theoretical framework called a map, and then test the map against the reality of experience in the world. That is precisely the manner in which faith is tested and tried and becomes wisdom.

Our first model, then, is a kind of Socratic questioning in reverse. Instead of attempting to push back to origins and foundations the eventual goal is to go beyond where we are now and to discover new territories. As teachers we may have been over the road before, and we will most likely have constructed a map of our journey, but it's important that the students build their own maps. The very process of map-making teaches one how to sift evidence, integrate various elements, and learn how to communicate one's discoveries.

As we have said, the initiatory question, "What do we know?," is a way of getting things moving and assessing where we are. The spatial allusion is important because there is a real sense in which we need to see how close or how far we are from each other in our initial understanding of the subject. To ask what we know is to inquire where we have come from, what we learned there, and what assumptions we are carrying right now. If we think of faith as a journey and each class period as another day to carry on the journey, the initiatory question is a way of taking account of our provisions for the journey. It is healthy and honest to lay our provisions on the table for our fellow travelers to see. "Here are the biases I'm encumbered with; these are the limits of my knowledge; this is how I came to this conclusion; this is where I am right now."

The second question is the exploratory question in which we ask "What can we know?" This is often the question which causes the most excitement. Here we are testing the limits of our knowledge as well as our faith by exploring beyond what we have allowed ourselves to know. Here we ask the really hard questions that not only cause us to examine our methodological structure and reasoning, but even more importantly, cause us to confront our fears and faith. Sometimes this takes a shift in perception.

There's an old story that illustrates this:

Ahmed was a trader who operated between the border of Iran and Afghanistan. Everyday he would lead a string of donkeys across into Iran, each of them loaded with sacks of goods. Everyday the border guards would dig through all the sacks, looking for

contraband; everyday they would find nothing. But they were convinced that Ahmed was smuggling *something*. This went on for years but they could never pin anything on him.

The day finally came when Ahmed decided to retire and live an easier life. He crossed the border for the last time with his sacks, the guards dug through each one, and again came up with nothing. A month or so later the sergeant in charge of the border station saw Ahmed having a cup of tea in the market and sat down next to him.

"Tell me, Ahmed," he said. "All those years you crossed the border every day, we always searched through your things because we thought you were smuggling something. Look, we never found a thing. I promise you, nothing will happen to you if you tell me the truth. I'm just curious: what were you smuggling in those sacks?"

Ahmed took a sip of tea, savored it on his tongue for a moment and then shook his head gravely. "I was smuggling donkeys," he said.

The exploratory question tries to look at the situation from a different angle, if possible. For example, if one of our initiatory questions prompted the assertion "I know that my Redeemer lives," an exploratory question might be, "What kind of Redeemer do you know?" or "Could that Redeemer be called by any other name but Jesus?"

The exploratory question is not restricted by anything but courtesy and seriousness of purpose. Within the classroom it should be understood that this stage is one of complete openness and honesty—experimental, free-flowing, and bounded only by time. This question has about it the nature of testimony, of confession, of speaking from the heart as well as from the head.

As a teacher I find this an exhilarating moment. This is where I may push the students, gently but firmly, beyond their assumptions. This is also a terrifying moment—if I can say that without melodrama—for I am not always sure where the path will lead us. Do I know where I am going with this line of questioning? Sometimes I do, sometimes I don't.

This is where the students themselves might begin to teach and this is where the teacher must learn to walk in humility. It might be that in all the give and take the students will pose a question to me that I cannot answer. The toughest questions, of course, are not the ones that you lack information on but the ones that call your very being into question.

Do we have the humility to be fellow travelers with our students? Are we willing to say, "I don't know what I would do in that situation," or "I'm not sure I believe that at this stage in my life"? Do we have an ethical obligation to constantly be out in front, leading our students, or is there a place for the students taking the lead?

In a memorable essay entitled "The College's Role in Integrating Faith and Learning," Dr. Frank Knittel says, "A teacher who is not totally, unequivocally, and openly committed to the Seventh-day Adventist Church has absolutely no business in our church education, for he will destroy souls."<sup>3</sup> Strong words, words to take seriously and to recall in the heat of the moment. God forbid that we should turn anyone away from the kingdom by a cynical remark. But the kingdom and the church are not one and the same, and perhaps there is a place for careful, constructive, and compassionate critiques of our church if we can accomplish that in humility.

The third question is the constructive one which asks, "What should we know?" In this stage we try to determine what provisional but necessary knowledge is essential to carry on the journey of faith. While we recognize that all our answers are incomplete we also realize that we probably have enough to go on and that in any case we have been blessed with enough provisions—among all of us—to attend to the tasks at hand. It is not necessary that all our questions be answered, for example, in order for us to be sympathetic listeners for another traveller. Nor is it imperative that all our arguments

be airtight in order to speak of what we know and love. What matters at this stage is that we work together to identify that which we can reasonably rely upon.

The last question is the praxiological one in which we ask, "What should we do with what we know?" Here is where we could follow liberation theology's emphasis upon praxis, the process in which the theory is tested on the street and the street modifies the theory. Our verbal world is penetrated and changed by the experiential world: we modify our maps as we actually cross the terrain ourselves. Thus, our faith in the map-making process results in our stepping out on the journey to make our own maps and in that way faith leads to action.

Two other benefits result from questioning as mapping. One is that this way of teaching positions the teacher as co-learner with the students. It requires an epistemological humility as a working principle that can forestall bouts of arrogance and contempt. At the same time the teacher does not abdicate responsibility for the structure and the purpose of the course. Instead, the teacher becomes the one who walks alongside the student rejoicing as new discoveries are made and acted upon. To quote the *Tao Te Ching*, "When the Master governs, the people are hardly aware that he exists. . . . The Master doesn't talk, he acts. When his work is done the people say, 'Amazing! We did it, all by ourselves!'"<sup>4</sup>

A second benefit is that real community can develop in the classroom as students and teacher work together for understanding. Communication is a transactional process of discovering and/or creating, interpreting and acting upon shared symbols. "The symbol gives rise to thought," says Paul Ricoeur, meaning that our maps become the occasion for reflection within our community about these shared symbols.

I recently taught an introductory course in philosophy in which the final exam required each student to borrow or create a single sentence describing the meaning of their life at that time. A 7-10 page paper accompanied the sentence and explained the process that the student went through to find it, the criteria developed to select it, and the influences in life that had brought them to that statement. On the day of the exam each student was handed a program designed like the notes for a play. Every person's sentence—including the teacher's—was featured on the playbill. All 26 of us sat in a circle for the last time while each one briefly shared the meaning of his or her sentence. It became an occasion of testimony and real fellowship as many spoke of how their lives had changed as a result of deep reflection upon the issues we had been studying. A typical comment came from one young woman who said, "At first I didn't know where we were going with all these questions and I felt lost and afraid. But gradually I learned that it was okay to think for myself and try out ideas because I always knew that if I fell you all would be there to pick me up. Now I feel like I know and trust a lot of you, and because of that I can know and trust in God."

### III. Persuasion: An Opportunity for Reasoned and Faith-full Choices

Persuasion is often regarded as the extroverted older brother of Influence and the younger brother of the brilliant and devious Propaganda, who is, of course, the spouse of the seductive but untrustworthy Manipulation and the proud father of the awful brat, Coercion. Despite such a disreputable lineage, Persuasion and Influence are good people and are not necessarily locked in co-dependent relationships with the other members of this dysfunctional family. Given the proper context and the right companions, Persuasion proves to be a valuable and loyal friend to the Christian teacher.

Research into persuasion came before the public in 1957 with Vance Packard's exposé of advertising entitled *The Hidden Persuaders*. Suddenly, everyone was privy to the best-kept secrets of the social engineers and psychologists who were feeding Madison Avenue with the latest data on people's deepest needs and desires. Over the years much of the related research in psychology, sociology, and communication theory has reinforced the idea that people are easily duped and manipulated into behavior they

would normally avoid. Stanley Milgram's study on the power of authority showed that ordinary people are capable of enormous cruelty if manipulated skillfully by an authority figure.<sup>5</sup> Routine studies into the effect of color, sound, movement, and other factors on consumers show how vulnerable we are to techniques that play to our desires. When we study the history of such research it rightly gives us pause when we consider using persuasion in the classroom.

Yet all of us are both persuaders and persuadees; most of our interpersonal communication, including this very presentation, is aimed at persuading people to our particular point of view. If we keep several key principles in mind as we teach we should be able to harness this power for the good.

But perhaps we should first consider a more basic question that goes to the heart of our intentions as Christians and as educators, and that is "Should Christian educators come to the classroom with a moral agenda or should they remain (in today's politically correct language) value-neutral?" Our answers to this depend on how seriously we take the belief that Christian education offers something to students beyond an opportunity to find a life-partner, vocational skills, and the chance to establish a network of peers—as important as those things are.

There is no such thing as value-neutral teaching or living. The essence of being human, says Gabriel Marcel, is to be in a situation. Being in a situation means that we find ourselves in the world, relating to people and being influenced, realizing that we are both part of our culture and transcendent of it. In other words, the moment we begin experiencing we are taking in the raw material of values, unconsciously sorting it into the nascent categories we have within ourselves, and later (as we become conscious of these processes) deliberately seeking out those values with which we wish to be identified. Values are principles expressed through attitudes which continue to interact with our will, intentions, and character long after more equivocal opinions have come and gone.

I do not wish to spend more time arguing for the value of Christian education and its unique mission in today's world. Others have done so with admirable gusto. I want to make the assumption that we have answered the call of Christian education because we earnestly desire our students to become intelligent, honorable, courageous, and faithful disciples who live in Christ. Those are high hopes but they are not unrealizable; after all, our teachers had the same hopes for us and we can daily examine ourselves to see if God's ideal is being worked out in our lives.

I'd like to look briefly at two persuasion theories that seem particularly appropriate to the classroom and then conclude with some warnings about classroom propaganda. But first, let's clarify some key ideas and terms about persuasion.

One crucial element that distinguishes persuasion from propaganda is that the receivers are given all the known facts. There is no conscious attempt to hide anything that would be needed to make an informed decision. Persuasion presupposes that the persuader lays out the facts in the case and relies on his or her logical, ethical, and affective powers to win over the persuadee.

Another element in persuasion is that the persuader must know the audience very well. That means being aware of the cultural context in which that communication situation is occurring and realizing the social, psychological, and spiritual variables that may have been instrumental in shaping those people. It means listening carefully to them as they attempt to persuade others, for they will use information that they themselves find persuasive. It also means deciding how far you go as a persuader in adapting to the needs and desires of the audience. Should you go so far as to change your own beliefs in order to attract and hold the audience? "On the other hand," says Charles Larson, "some measure of adaptation in language choice, supporting materials, organization, and message transmission to reflect the specific nature of the audience is a crucial part of successful communication."<sup>6</sup>

A third element in successful persuasion is the concept that persuasion is transactional between the persuader and the persuadee. That is to say, it is not a solo effort on the part of the persuader, but it is a cooperative and dynamic relationship between the sender and the receiver. In fact, the persuader looks for the common ground between herself and the persuadee and the persuadee meets her halfway. "Persuasion can be viewed as a transaction in which both persuaders and persuadees bear mutual responsibility to participate actively in the process."<sup>7</sup>

Now one of the rather unsettling implications of this tendency is that even if we are determined not to be persuaded by the carefully designed attacks of advertising, for example, there is a part of us that doesn't wish to offend or to put people off and so we willingly go along like lambs to the slaughter. Unscrupulous persuaders know that it takes more psychic and emotional energy than most people are capable of to resist the appeals and so they home in like heat-seeking missiles on our weak spots. Many of our students come into our classrooms anxious to please or at least anxious to get a good grade; they are preconditioned to be persuaded to our view to the extent that they perform the behaviors that will net them an acceptable grade even before we open our mouths. That is why we must exercise our persuasive powers with care and compassion because we never know how vulnerable someone might be to conformity without first understanding and then assenting.

#### SOCIAL JUDGMENT—INVOLVEMENT THEORY

Social judgment-involvement theory is a receiver-based explanation for persuasion. That means the receiver actively responds and interacts with the persuader rather than simply being a passive receptor. In fact, the receiver plays the most important role in the exchange in that he or she accepts or rejects the message of the persuader. Muzafer Sherif and his colleagues developed two concepts in the theory. The first is that all of us operate from *anchor points*, internal reference points that we are constantly using to evaluate our experiences. The theory posits that we will accept most propositions if they are close to our anchor points, but reject them if they are far from those points.

Social judgement-involvement theory speaks of latitudes of acceptance and latitudes of rejection. Thus, one's latitude of acceptance can hold various propositions in differing degrees of intensity, with the same being true for latitudes of rejection. The theory asserts that most people automatically accept or reject ideas that fall within these two zones. A third latitude is that of noncommitment—positions about which receivers do not feel strongly but are open to persuasion.

As persuaders we should be aware that people are extremely vulnerable to persuasion that falls within their latitude of acceptance, extremely resistant to persuasion within their latitude of rejection, and open to change in the latitude of noncommitment. The latitudes of acceptance and rejection vary from person to person and from issue to issue. One person might have a wide latitude of acceptance to the idea that Jesus Christ is the Son of God while another person might have a narrow latitude. Obviously, as persuaders, it's important to know the degrees of intensity within our audiences' latitudes of acceptance, rejection, and noncommitment in order to shape our messages for the greatest effect.

The second major concept behind this theory is that our acceptance or rejection of a persuasive message depends on our degree of ego-involvement. A high degree of involvement usually indicates a deep conviction; low involvement usually means shifting beliefs and attitudes. We accept concepts that we approve of because it makes us feel good about ourselves for having made the right choice.

Furthermore, acting on that choice reinforces our convictions. If we are open or resistant to persuasion about these messages it is in large measure because a

good deal of our self-identity and self-esteem may be tied up in maintaining our positions. That would suggest that while we may, in fact, agree with a notion we once rejected out of hand, our ego-involvement has invested a lot in staying consistent, even to the extent that we go against our better judgment. Our job as persuaders will not only involve convincing the persuadee on the merits of the message but perhaps also reassuring that person that they are accepted no matter what position they hold. Notice the theory says nothing about how we come to hold the original anchor points for it is intended only to measure the scope and intensity of influence of those points in actual practice.

Each of us would most likely apply this theory of persuasion in different ways, and yet we could make some generalizations for the classroom that might be helpful. First, it seems important to recognize that every person holds anchor points and holds them dearly. They might be different than ours and they might not be clearly formulated or articulated but they are principles that people live by. Secondly, the means through which we bring the latitudes of acceptance or rejection to light is careful and competent questioning. Perhaps this is a case in which the questioning approach we spoke of earlier can lay the foundation for use of this form of persuasion. For example, we might say in a discussion, "Under what circumstances would you be willing to act on this or that belief?" or "Given this idea of goodness or right, what would be your response?" or "How would you characterize your attitude toward these kinds of values and beliefs?"

Thirdly, the persuasive action in this approach lies in bringing to the consciousness of the student not only the depth of those anchor points but the breadth of the latitudes of acceptance and rejection. And in those areas in which a person remains noncommittal, those areas which we might feel as Christian educators are important to consider, we have an opportunity to show why we ourselves place them within our own latitudes of acceptance or rejection. Certainly we cannot force our students to take some kind of stand, but we can influence them to see the importance of considering such issues.

#### ROKEACH'S BELIEF HIERARCHY

The second theory of persuasion we shall consider, Milton Rokeach's belief hierarchy, is also receiver-based and addresses the complex web of attitudes, beliefs, values, and behaviour changes.<sup>8</sup>

Rokeach speculates that attitudes, beliefs, and values are interwoven and ranked in various hierarchies into a single belief system that receivers bring to the persuasive situation. Like the layers of an onion, some are at the core, or center of the system, whereas others are at the periphery. The outer layers are much easier to alter than are the ones at the center, and, as we get closer and closer to the core, change becomes nearly impossible. Rokeach speaks of five levels of belief:

##### 1. *Primitive beliefs (unanimous consensus).*

These come from our direct experience of the world and we find consensus on them from peers. Examples might be: we are a certain age and nationality, or that the sun rises in the east. These beliefs rarely change and are almost axiomatic.

##### 2. *Primitive beliefs (zero consensus)*

We learn these by direct experience as well, but they are privately held beliefs. They are personal and we do not get direct confirmation from outside. These beliefs often govern our sense of self-esteem and self-image. Examples would be: a belief that you are a certain kind of person—lazy, energetic, personable, aloof. Another example might be related to how you perceive others feel about you. Again, these beliefs rarely change.

### 3. Authority beliefs

These are sometimes controversial and related to our relationships with others—usually parents, peers, pastors, teachers. Examples might be: “Honesty is the best policy,” or “Christianity is the only true religion,” or “The church will go through to the end.” These beliefs *are* changeable, but only with much life experience or with persuasion.

### 4. Derived beliefs

These beliefs develop from our interchanges with those we trust, but in a secondhand fashion rather than directly through our own experience. They would be beliefs developed from our reading, from TV, from news reports, from religious, cultural, educational, or political figures whose credibility is high with us. We hold these beliefs because we trust the figures, but this kind can be changed through persuasion much easier than any of the other deeper beliefs.

### 5. Inconsequential beliefs

These are individual preferences and tastes, easily changed because they are not significant and do not affect our self-identity. “I prefer to use a green pen when marking papers rather than a red pen,” would be an example or “I like my french fries with ketchup.”

According to Rokeach, these beliefs can be clustered to form attitudes which then predispose us to behave in certain ways. We hold literally thousands of these beliefs in our attitudinal belief systems, and they interact with each other to form attitudes which, says Rokeach, fall into two main categories: 1) attitudes toward objects, and 2) attitudes toward situations. Whenever we have decisions to make we fall back on these attitudinal clusters in order to decide how to respond. For example, I might find some person offensive and rude but I would mask my displeasure behind a facade of politeness because I have been taught not to give vent to my every impulse in public. A week later, in a similar situation, I might do just the opposite.

Again, the power and the responsibility lies with the receiver in responding to the attitudes that predispose us to think and act in certain ways. This becomes especially clear in interpersonal situations when we are trying to persuade someone to join us in an activity or when we are being persuaded to change our attitude toward a particular set of beliefs held by someone we don't trust.

Rokeach's belief hierarchy has tremendous potential for Christian educators. If we think of the deep primitive beliefs as the *core values* of a culture and a community, and we think of the inconsequential beliefs as the *peripheral values*, we can begin to clarify what is of primary and secondary importance to us as a community.

How do professional persuaders utilize these ideas? No one really tries to change Type A beliefs, the primitive beliefs held through unanimous consensus.

It is the business of counselors, psychotherapists, and perhaps Christian educators to help change Type B- beliefs—the negative self-images—and to strengthen Type B+ beliefs. The specialized persuaders, the political and religious partisans and other ideological persuaders, are most concerned to change Types C and D, the authority and derived beliefs. Finally, advertisers try to change Type E beliefs (inconsequential) and Type D beliefs (derived). By bringing together various combinations of beliefs advertisers can persuade us to change brands of consumer items. One common method is to associate inconsequential beliefs, such as our brand of athletic shoes, with authority beliefs, such as testimonials from Michael Jordan or Shaquille O’Neal. Still another tactic is to put together Type E (inconsequential beliefs) with Type B- (negative self-images) in order to sell a particular brand of shampoo or gasoline on the assumption that it will make us feel better about ourselves.

For Rokeach, beliefs and attitudes may *predispose* us to action, but values *guide* us to action and are the most important elements in the beliefs-values-attitude triad. These values, together with our attitudes and beliefs, form our self-concept. We want to be satisfied with our self-concept so we work hard to achieve balance and congruence. Only when the inconsistency, incongruence, or dissonance is great enough to make us uncomfortable and make us question our self-concept, is change possible. That is why Week of Prayer speakers will often attempt to throw us off balance by making us feel guilty, asking us to get on the bandwagon, and to identify with those in authority whom we admire and whose approval we seek.

As we can see, the potential for persuading people with these methods is great. The potential for manipulation and real harm is great also. One can hardly conceive of Paul sitting down to plan a strategy of persuasion with the crowds in a market in Corinth, nevertheless, his persuasive techniques can be easily examined.

The point is that we are always persuading and being persuaded. As receivers we need to become aware of the methods and techniques persuaders use on us; as persuaders ourselves, and as Christian educators with lively and, hopefully, healthy consciences, we need to reflect on how we might persuade in an honorable and ethical way.

### Conclusion

We have seen that two ways to teach can help us help our students to question their faith and to weigh the evidence. The first, questioning as mapping, allows us as teachers to be co-learners with our students and to explore in freedom various facets of the issues at hand. By working freely and responsibly with different kinds of questions we are enabled to move from what we know to what we can do with the new knowledge we arrive at together. The second method, two types of receiver-based persuasion, provides us with means to convince students on the basis of honest, reasoned, passionate, and ethical principles, of the value of certain positions.

They say that getting there is half the fun; as a teacher I can say that not a day goes by in the classroom but what I thank God for meaningful work that satisfies and challenges me. We are all travellers and mapmakers and the blessing of Christian fellowship through education is that we can share our maps together, explore the far horizons, and someday, as the Christian philosopher and playwright, Gabriel Marcel, wrote at the end of the war in Paris in 1944:

Oh, spirit of metamorphosis!  
 When we try to obliterate the frontier of clouds  
 which separates us from the other world  
 guide our unpractised movements!  
 And, when the given hour shall strike,  
 arouse us, eager as the traveller  
 who straps on his rucksack  
 while beyond the misty window-pane  
 the earliest rays of dawn are faintly visible!<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>My interest in using this particular metaphor was triggered by E. F. Schumacher's book, *A Guide for the Perplexed*. (New York: Harper & Row, Perennial Edition, 1977).

<sup>2</sup>See Hayakawa, S. I. and Alan R. Hayakawa. *Language in Thought and Action*, 5th ed. (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990), p. 19.

<sup>3</sup>Knittel, Frank. "The College's Role in Integrating Faith and Learning." *The Journal of Adventist Education*, Vol. 41, No. 2, December 1978-January, 1979., p. 7.

<sup>4</sup>Mitchell, Stephen. *Tao Te Ching*. (New York: HarperCollins, HarperPerennial ed., 1991), p. 17.

<sup>5</sup>Milgram, Stanley. *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* (New York: Harper and Row, Pubs., 1974).

<sup>6</sup>Larson, Charles. *Persuasion: Reception and Responsibility*. 6th ed. (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth Press, 1993), p. 32.

<sup>7</sup>Larson, *ibid.*

<sup>8</sup>Larson, pp.76-77, for fuller explanations.

<sup>9</sup>Marcel, Gabriel. *Homo Viator: Introduction to a Metaphysic of Hope*, trans. by Emma Craufurd (Gloucester, MA: Peter Smith, 1978), p. 36.