

Inquire and Advocate

The easiest place to reawaken Trinitarian values that leave little room for competition is to join a natural learning community. The natural give and take of mutual *inquiry* and *advocacy* begin to redevelop neural connections necessary to learn this way. People grow most rapidly when they feel the challenges in community learning are just over their heads—at least, at first—and have a mentor or coach who offers them a helping hand.

Inquire by temporarily laying aside our own values and assumptions, best we can. Otherwise, we will simply see what we have always seen, forfeiting the joy of learning from others in community. We all see with filters, a gift that God has built into our minds to filter out the important from the millions of unimportant signals we receive each day. However, our filters may also interfere with learning, unless we become aware of them and choose to lay these aside to inquire into what others are saying. Lay down our need to look good and be seen as an expert. Also lay down our fears that we may look like the dunce. Seek to first understand the mind, heart and passions of the other *from their viewpoint* without imposing our own. Listen without an agenda.

Advocate by picking up our values and assumptions again. Re-examine them carefully in light of what we are now learning. Determine to remain a lifelong *life-learner*, but don't bob about like a cork on the waves of the views and opinions of others. Champion our opinions and ideas. Defend, explain, and support them. This mutual give-&-take accelerates learning.

Then, since this is a dialog of mutual openness and learning, be willing to “*agree to disagree*” if no common ground is discovered, with full love and acceptance and without looking down on each other. Experience the mutuality that this natural learning environment accesses. We are not battling on the ground of “*right & wrong*,” which is the ground our ancestors embraced with the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil and Law. Rather ask, “*What is the Father doing?*” (John 5:19). The Spirit will not lead

us into what is morally wrong, but He will at times lead us into what we erroneously believe is wrong.

Can you hear the distinction?

Tolerance is a word much bandied about today. “*Classic tolerance*,” though, encourages both sides to know what they believe. There *are* absolutes. Advocate strongly for our opinions and honestly inquire into the ideas of the others from the viewpoint of others, so that we may learn and grow. “*Classic tolerance*” has strong values and beliefs. It puts our views and values on hold for a time, however, so that we can understand others as they see themselves, communicating respect and dignity.

Many spiritual development programs are packaged as short-term seminars or workshops. Imitating our microwave society with its short-term fixes will **not** bring ideal lasting change. By contrast, a learning community aligns with recent studies on how our mind works. These type skills and values are best learned through extended practice and feedback. The limbic brain...

“...is a much slower learner—particularly when the challenge is to relearn deeply ingrained habits. This difference matters immensely when trying to improve leadership skills: At their most basic level, those skills come down to habits learned early in life. If those habits are no longer sufficient, or hold a person back, learning takes longer. Reeducating the **emotional brain** for... learning, therefore requires a **different model** from what works for the **thinking brain**: It needs lots of practice and repetition” (Goleman, Boyatzis, McKee, *Primal Leadership*, **emphasis**).

Both/And. The dual skills of *inquiry* and *advocacy* promote dialog in a healthy learning community where each adds their full value. This healthy confidence in how highly God views us and how thoroughly the Holy Spirit equips and frees us to look at life through the lens of the other without indiscriminately swallowing everything. Without this weighty base, we will get mired down in the swamps on either side of the stream of life, either venting our opinions without listening or stuffing our opinions in the other swamp. Both swamps rob a community of vital resources