

“SOCRATIC” EVANGELISM

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Purpose of This Paper

My secular occupation for decades has been in insurance training. My company, AAA Mid-Atlantic, has developed its own sales training for new associates called “Solution Selling” and places considerable emphasis on sales communication, both wording and techniques. In a recent National Alliance for Insurance Education & Training conference, Dynamics of Selling, the presenters stressed the creation of a sales culture and selling that relied heavily on “Creating Questions with Purpose.”¹ One presenter strongly recommended a little sales book, *Socratic Selling: How to Ask the Questions that Get the Sale* by Kevin Daley.² While at an RPTS course in Pittsburgh, I discovered Dorothy Leeds’ groundbreaking *The 7 POWERS of Questions: Secrets to Successful Communication in Life and at Work*³ on my son’s bookshelf. It carried financial guru and New York mayor Michael R. Bloomberg’s recommendation that it “gives us an entirely new way to turn an ordinary conversation tool into a formidable ally.” Since I knew many in the past applied their professional skills and insights to fashion successful evangelistic techniques—Charles Finney’s legal interrogation approach and Dwight Moody’s retail shoe salesman’s techniques come to mind—I thought that the principles of Daley’s *Socratic Selling* or Leeds’ *Dialogue Selling*⁴ might profitably be adapted to Reformed Christian Evangelism. To explore that possibility, I have constructed my own suggested approach for the consideration of the Reformed community and as a possible alternative tool in my own retirement efforts for the glory of God and the advancement of His Church.

Evangelistic Methods

Many evangelistic methods have been proposed and used, both historically and currently. All have been constructed within the context of the Holy Spirit’s efforts to apply the saving work of our Lord Jesus in furtherance of the Father’s eternal purpose and everlasting covenant. All have had virtues, and all have had defects stemming from the touch of the sin-scarred humanity through whom God has graciously chosen to allow His glory to shine. I do not here wish to focus on the defects but rather to glean principles to guide my own construction of an evangelistic method.

¹The National Alliance for Insurance Education & Research, *Dynamics of Selling* (Austin, TX: The National Alliance, 2008), pp. 37-57.

² Kevin Daley with Emmett Wolfe, *Socratic Selling* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1996).

³ Dorothy Leeds, *The 7 POWERS of Questions: Secrets to Successful Communication in Life and at Work* (New York: Penquin Putnum Inc., 2000).

⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 186-198.

One of the first I learned and used was “The Romans Road.” It frames a simple presentation of hamartiology and soteriology on verses from Romans (3:23; 6:23) with a call to come to Christ through 10:9-10. The virtue in this approach is that it allows the Spirit to utilize some of the order of thought He has embedded in His living Word. The more a method follows His Biblical structure, the more freedom He will have to demonstrate His power, should He so chose.

A second approach I was taught, but did not use much, was Campus Crusade’s arresting approach that begins with “God loves you and has a wonderful plan for your life.” It then explains the plan of salvation with the expectation the person approached will embrace it in Christ. The virtue I find here is its theocentric beginning. Placing God first and emphasizing His love for men touches upon two primary truths that need to be established before the anthropocentric focus on sin can be properly appreciated.

I was privileged to be part of Mitch Triestman’s class on Jewish evangelism when he was writing and presenting the material in his study *To The JEW FIRST: A Textbook on Jewish Evangelism*.⁵ It was an extraordinary opportunity to be part of the mental and emotional struggles of an enthusiastically dedicated and successful evangelistic missionary trying to formulate and share himself and his ministry with others. Mitch’s book exemplifies the truth that a Christian worker must enter with understanding and respect the intellectual and emotional world of the person he wishes to reach. A specialized body of knowledge may be required. For Jewish evangelism, it includes a knowledge of Bible prophecy (especially, the interpretation of First Advent Old Testament texts), Jewish emotional and intellectual etiquette (such as attitudes about the Holocaust and Anti-Semitism), etc. Hence, wide reading and understanding of non-Christian and anti-Christian thought processes is highly desirable. Mitch’s ministry also points out that evangelism must often be personalized for the individual.⁶ All Jews are not cookie-cutter versions of one another. Paul’s description of his own ministry still applies: “...I kept back nothing that was profitable *unto you*, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house...” (Acts 20:20). In short, all the skills of effective communication—thoughtful preparation, active listening, etc.—must be utilized in personal evangelism.

Mitch also had his students prepare a brief (1 minute) personal testimony to be used in limited encounter situations—such as I experience when gas station attendants ask about my car’s license plate (PSALM 68). This evangelistic tool fits well with Harold Sevenor’s observation that “it seemed that no matter where he went, Mitch could turn any occasion into an opportunity to present the Gospel.”⁷ Attentiveness to creating or availing oneself of opportunities is another great principle for the would-be evangelist.

A fourth evangelical method in my training is Dr. Kennedy’s *Evangelism Explosion*.⁸ It is an engaging attempt to structure the gospel to maintain interest and

⁵ Mitch Triestman, *To the Jew First: A Textbook on Jewish Evangelism* (Levittown, PA: Lifeline Publications, 1997).

⁶ A similar course that I audited at the Reformed Presbyterian Seminary in Pittsburgh on Islamic evangelism reinforced the same needs in another area of evangelism. See Bassam M. Madany, *The BIBLE and ISLAM: Sharing God’s Word With a Muslim* (Palos Heights, IL: The Back to God Hour, 1992).

⁷ Cited from Harold Sevenor’s *A Rabbi’s Vision* on the back cover of Triestman, op. cit.

⁸ D. James Kennedy, *Evangelism Explosion* (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, 4th edition, 1996).

brevity through a logical, friendly conversational style. There should be in the evangelist's repertoire a generalized presentation applicable to "everyman."

I am also impressed by Ken Ham's *Creation Evangelism*.⁹ He pleads for a more comprehensive theological approach to evangelism in response to today's radically anti-Christian teaching and the unquestioning acceptance of non-theistic evolutionary creation theory so prevalent in the culture of the 21st Century. Ham has made a good case for the need to step back to prepare for planting of the gospel seed by burning out the briars and life-sucking weeds that populate the would-be gospel garden soil. This aggressive apologetic approach seems a necessity for effective modern evangelism.

Another well-thought-out approach is Trevor McIlwain's Firm Foundations, developed for the New Tribes Mission efforts at world evangelism. My daughter and son-in-law served under New Tribes in Papua New Guinea and introduced me to McIlwain's *FIRM FOUNDATIONS: Creation to Christ* approach.¹⁰ Attempting to reach tribes with little recent Christian contact and no Biblically-influenced cultural common ground, New Tribes found that after initial contact and orientation through extended language and life association, missionaries had to spend upward of a year presenting stories and instruction from the Old Testament before the tribesmen were ready to adequately understand and receive the knowledge of Christ's work and gospel. The principle here is the need many have for broader theological preparation before the gospel can be received with the appreciation it deserves.

A seventh approach that impresses me is Wilbur Lingle's. He is currently devoting his life to working with Jehovah's Witnesses.¹¹ After having spent decades as a missionary in Japan, he has developed a method to reach Jehovah's Witnesses in the United States. His book and personal training emphasize patient persistence and loving development of individual relationships as keys to slow, one-by-one success in this ministry.

Finally, I will close this survey of evangelistic methods by referring to George G. Hunter III's *The Celtic Way of Evangelism*.¹² Hunter presents the concept of societal evangelism by a church moving as a body into a community to evangelize it by living penetration of the community at all levels. H. Joseph Miller advocates a form of this in his two volume practicum, *Building the Church*.¹³ These studies are a great reminder that ultimately evangelism must pass beyond the lone evangelist and involve the life and witness of all the people of God.

⁹ Ken Ham, *Creation Evangelism for the New Millennium* (Green Forest, AR: Master Books, 1998).

¹⁰ Trevor McIlwain with Nancy Everson, *FIRM FOUNDATIONS: Creation to Christ* (Sanford, FL: New Tribes Mission, 1994).

¹¹ Wilbur Lingle, *Approaching Jehovah's Witnesses In Love: How to Witness Effectively Without Arguing* (Ft. Washington, PA: Christian Literature Crusade, 1994).

¹² George G. Hunter III, *The Celtic Way of Evangelism: How Christianity Can Reach the West...Again* (Nashville: Abington Press, 2000).

¹³ H. Joseph Miller, *Building the Church*, 2 vols. (Greenville, SC: BJU Press, 2003).

In this hurried survey, I have not attempted to be Biblically,¹⁴ historically¹⁵ or academically¹⁶ exhaustive. Instead, I have sought formative principles to utilize for my own philosophy of evangelism.

Some principles I hope to incorporate include: following a Biblical order of presentation (Romans Road, Evangelism Explosion, and Firm Foundations), a theocentric emphasis (Campus Crusade), a focus on individualized evangelism suited to the prospective convert (Triestman, Madany, Lingle), an attempt to lay a solid foundation for his understanding (Ham's Creation Evangelism, McIlwain's Firm Foundations), an attempt to establish a lasting relationship (Lingle), and finally, an attempt to broaden that relationship to include the witness within the entire community of the church (The Celtic Way, Miller). I should like to accomplish this within the context of an historically Reformed Theology, which some of those cited do not advocate (for example, the dispensationalist Mitch Triestman).

A "Socratic" Method of Evangelism

The method I propose will adapt principles from modern Socratic selling techniques and Question Theory to the common call to further the Holy Spirit's application of Christ's work to the elect.

Socrates and the Socratic Method

Although I will readapt a modern adaptation of the "Socratic" method for evangelism, something should be said of the original Socrates' purpose and methodology which the Presbyterian historian and Calvin scholar John T. McNeill's 1951 study, *A History of the Cure of Souls*¹⁷ has noticed.

Socrates (469-399 B.C.) saw himself as a divinely appointed "ἰατροψυχῆς," a physician or healer of the soul.¹⁸ His method was to engage his "patient" in severe self-analysis using probing questions that "reduced [him] to a state of complete perplexity (*aporia*) and self-distrust" which McNeill sees as "the intellectual counterpart of 'conviction of sin' in Christian evangelism."¹⁹ He then helped him back to know himself, confident in an intellectually examined life.

Without baptizing Socrates' obvious pagan humanism and high confidence in the power of the human intellect, evangelists may note (1) his individualized care for each soul and (2) his methodic use of probing questions in a dialectic duel aimed at helping the

¹⁴ F. A. Noble, *Typical New Testament Conversions* (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1901).

¹⁵ Michael Green, *Evangelism in the Early Church* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970).

¹⁶ Bryan Green, *The Practice of Evangelism* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1951); Wade C. Smith, *New Testament Evangelism: "Come and See"—"Go and Tell": A Manual of Personal Work...* (Richmond, VA: Presbyterian Committee of Publication, 1930).

¹⁷ John T. McNeill, *A History of the Cure of Souls* (New York: Harper & Brothers Publishers, 1951).

¹⁸ Op. cit., p. 20.

¹⁹ Op. cit., p. 22.

individual diagnose his own state. Of course, they should seek a Biblical basis for using a similar method.

A Biblical Basis for Using Probing Questions in Evangelism

The Lord through Isaiah calls sinners in Judah to reason with Him: “Come now, and let us reason together, saith the LORD: though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they be red like crimson, they shall be as wool.” (Isaiah 1:18) The evangelist also should reason with sinners. This dialectic should probe deeply into the heart, and it can be done since Proverbs 20:5 states, “The purposes of a man’s heart are deep waters, but a man of understanding draws them out;” and our Lord asserts, “Of the abundance of the heart, his mouth speaketh.” (Luke 6:45) Note Malachi’s three rapid-fire probes in Malachi 2:10. In similar fashion, Christian counselors already use “heart-revealing questions” to “help counselees become aware of their agendas.”²⁰

Well-framed questions address an individual’s needs. In discussing his counselee’s problems, the Christian counselor Paul David Tripp says,

“There is a principle here...: insightful people are insightful not because they have the right answers but because they have asked the right questions.... [Celia asked] “Why isn’t God working in my life?” This is a bad question, based on an unbiblical assumption, which cannot lead in a good direction.... To ask Celia’s question biblically, one must start with the following biblical assumption: God is ever active in my life.... A better way of asking the question is to say, “God is redemptively active in my life, so what is he doing and why don’t I recognize it? This question can lead to greater insight, biblical change, and a harvest of good fruit.”²¹

The counseling evangelist should likewise ask appropriate questions to help the person approached with biblically appropriate, insightful questions. Jesus exemplified this when the chief priests and elders approached Him just before Passover to ask “By what authority doest thou these things?” He denied them a direct answer by raising another question they refused to answer since it involved a dilemma. He then drew them into condemning themselves with a parable and asking, “Did ye never read in the scriptures, “The Stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner: this is the LORD’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes?...” (Matthew 21:42) The question was perfect. It built upon Psalm 118:22-23, the climax of the Passover Hallel, the very scripture they were preparing to lead Israel in singing at the table. They perceived its application to themselves and learned how evil their hearts were. “A word fitly spoken is *like* apples of gold in pictures of silver.” (Proverbs 25:11) Evangelists also must learn to appropriately frame questions to help men realistically probe their own sinful situations and see their need of Christ.

²⁰ Paul David Tripp, *Instruments in the Redeemer’s Hands: People in Need of Change Helping People in Need of Change* (Phillipsburg, New Jersey: P&R Publishers, 2002), p.316.

²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 284-5.

Working with the Holy Spirit

It is the Holy Spirit to Whom our God has committed the mission and ministry of proclaiming and applying Christ's salvation. "When the Comforter is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, he shall testify of me" (John 15:26). It is essential that the evangelist work with, depend on, and subordinate his efforts to the leadership of the Spirit. He may function most actively by prayer and testimony, etc., in His common call based on our Savior's desire to "have all men to be saved" (I Timothy 2:3-4). Of His indispensable life-giving, inward effectual call, however, he can only be an enthusiastic encourager and, ultimately, a simple, joyful observer, for that call is His and His alone.²²

Scripture: Genesis 1-3

The first three chapters of Genesis will be the basic scripture in this proposed method of evangelism. It is an obvious foundational choice in working with the Spirit. (1) He inspired it: it is His own speech (II Timothy 3:16; II Peter 1:21). (2) It contains an abbreviated, but rather complete, flow of His thought. All the topics of theology may be introduced through it. (3) It is theocentric, rather than anthropocentric, in its thrust. This allows a less offensive, less confrontational and deeper conviction of sin as it may be used to **emphasize** the offense and hurt of God in sin rather than the anthropocentric thrust of pollution and fear-laced damnation involved in so many evangelistic presentations. (4) It will lend itself to everyman's situation; and (5) it will allow the evangelist to grow in his own faith and deepen his presentation skills by repeated meditation on it and in repeatedly discussing its thoughts. He will, thereby, become a better instrument of the Spirit's common call. (6) It contains the first expression of the Covenant of Grace which can be used to make the common call.

(7) Genesis 1-3 also offers opportunity to discuss all the pre-evangelistic concerns of Ken Ham's Creation Evangelism. Ham is correct in saying that "the unchurched are becoming more difficult to reach."²³ The old Greek evolutionary philosophy has captured the education system and the hearts of the majority in our society. For most, life and morality have become as meaningless as our God for Whose glory they were created (Romans 1:21-25). "There is no more foundational message than God is Creator. After all, if God is not Creator, then nothing else matters. All is meaningless."²⁴ The evangel becomes trash to be discarded. In the proposed use of Genesis 1-3, the topic of creation will arise immediately after considering God Himself. This allows the destructive ancient delusion to be clarified up front. Of course, the evangelist will need to settle his own understanding of creation—literal six day creation or gap theory or some theistic evolutionary view—and determine beforehand the views he will find tolerable in his

²² Currently, the best available English studies of the Holy Spirit's work in conversion are Herman Bavinck's *Saved by Grace: The Holy Spirit's Work in Calling and Regeneration* (translated by Nelson D. Kloosterman and edited by J. Mark Beach, Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2008) and James Buchanan's popular classic, *The Office and Work of the Holy Spirit* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1966).

²³ Ham, op. cit., p. 67.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 101.

prospect before moving on in the text. I am very comfortable with a six literal day creation and young earth concepts, but I recognize others may be sincerely convinced otherwise. May the Spirit graciously grant His light to all in this much contested area.

(8) Genesis 1-3 also allows the evangelist to start with topics that are, by the choice of the Holy Spirit, easy and essential for the unsaved man to understand. As the Westminster Confession (21.1) expresses it: “The light of nature shows that there is a God, who has lordship and sovereignty over all; is good, and does good unto all; and is therefore to be feared, loved, praised, called upon, trusted in and served, with all the heart, and with all the soul, and with all the might.” Using Genesis 1-3 allows a “soft” entrance and strong reminder of these pre-evangelism truths.

Method: “Socratic” Dialogue

This evangelistic method proposes adapting modern “Socratic” sales thought, particularly Kevin Daley’s widely successful *Socratic Selling* techniques, to the cure of souls.

Use of Questions

There is currently much attention being given in American culture to the beneficial use of questions. Besides Daley, most sales approaches focus on using questions as the means to obtain a sale. Other areas also have been touched. Dorothy Leeds has devoted a lifetime to thinking about how to use questions. Her self-help book is *The 7 POWERS of Questions*.²⁵ Andrew Finlayson, a well-known San Francisco news director, has offered *Questions That Work: How to Ask Questions That Will Help You Succeed in Any Business Situation*.²⁶ And in more academic/scientific areas, Drs. Linda Elder and Richard Paul have produced *The Miniature Guide to the Art of Asking Essential Questions*.²⁷ In fact, Neil Postman, the relationships advocate and author of *Technopoly, The Surrender of Culture to Technology*, has said, “Learning to use a computer isn’t nearly as important as learning how to ask smart questions.”²⁸

Dorothy Leeds, whose own question-based sales strategy is called *Dialogue Selling*,²⁹³⁰ offers a general list of their utilitarian virtues in *The 7 POWERS of Questions*.

²⁵ Leeds, op. cit. She has also authored *Smart Questions* and *Powerspeak* and lectures widely on the topic.

²⁶ Andrew Finlayson, *Questions That Work* (New York: American Management Association [AMACOM], 2001).

²⁷ Linda Elder and Richard Paul, *The Miniature Guide to The Art of Asking Essential Questions: Based on Critical Thinking Concepts and Socratic Principles* (Dillon Beach, CA: The Foundation for Critical Thinking, 4th edition, 2006).

²⁸ Neil Postman, cited in Leeds, *7 Powers*, p. 5.

²⁹ “Always Be Conversing, Clarifying, Connecting, gaining Commitment, and Closing!” Leeds, op. cit., pp.186-198.

³⁰ The very engaging and entertaining—at one time she was a Broadway Chorus girl—Ms. Leeds has strongly criticized Peter Senge’s ideal of a Learning Organization as having proved too impractical for the vast majority of organizations [Peter M. Senge, *The Fifth Discipline: The Art & Discipline of the Learning Organization* (New York: Currency and Doubleday, 1990)]. Instead, she advocates the Questioning Organization which promotes creativity—“why can’t I fly like a bird?” leads to the airplane—etc.

- 1. Questions demand answers.**
- 2. Questions stimulate thinking.**
- 3. Questions give us valuable information.**
- 4. Questions put you in control.**
- 5. Questions get people to open up.**
- 6. Questions lead to quality listening.**
- 7. Questions get people to persuade themselves.**

1. Using questions compels people to reflexively answer. We are so conditioned from our toddler days learning to speak and throughout our schooling. “If we hear a question, we know the person is looking for an answer from us, and our normal response is to try and be cooperative.”³¹ The evangelist should use this human reflex, as Jesus often did, to gain his prospect’s attention and to probe for the information he needs to individualize his gospel presentation.

2. Questions stimulate the thinking of both of the asker and the responder, especially open-ended probing or clarifying question. “Could you explain that further” or “Help me understand why you think that is so” carry thought to a deeper level. Modern accelerated learning emphasizes experience-based participatory learning, and good questions can involve another more deeply in the process.³² Satan evidently wants to “fill the heart” with sin. Should we not, like Peter, use questions—he used 4—to probe deeply and stimulate thought and conviction under the Holy Spirit? (Acts 5:1-5)

3. Questions obtain valuable information. The evangelist must know *this person*—his ideas, religious training, attitudes and situation in life, etc.—to communicate “a word fitly spoken” (Proverbs 25:11). Jesus used a question to uncover the attitudes of the rich young ruler before offering sage direction (Luke 18:18ff.).³³ We need to do the same.

4. Questions can control a conversation to maintain direction, but should not be used for aggressive manipulation—the last thing to employ when seeking a heart-felt response to Christ. Even in the sales process, Daley emphasizes using questions to “yield control of the dialogue to the customer.” He alone should supply the “needs information” the salesman must have to pursue the sale.³⁴ Questions are like tennis practice. Keeping the ball in the court allows the other player to continue the volley.

5. People open up to questions about themselves and love to talk of things that interest them. They know the topic best and are flattered others find them interesting and valuable. “If you show yourself...interested in who they are and what they do, they will be more interested in you.”³⁵ This helps build the lasting relationship Lingle sought for effective evangelism.

³¹ Linguist James L. Fidelholtz, cited in Leeds, op. cit., p. 17.

³² Leeds, op. cit., p.51.

³³ I used to think I could not follow Jesus’ method since I was taught as a child never to answer a question with a question. Then I saw a quote from the Jewish Talmud that said “He that answers a question with a question is a wise man.” I now see many advantages in the practice, chiefly clarification. Another example from our Lord is Mark 11:27-33.

³⁴ Daley, op. cit., p. 38.

³⁵ Leeds, op. cit., p. 115.

6. Questions promote the quality listening that stimulates mutual exchange of ideas and leads to useful conclusions and, ultimately, the decision the evangelist seeks.

7. Most importantly, questions help people persuade themselves. Leeds offers a striking example. Early in her career as a workshop speaker she was approached by a major brokerage executive to prepare a training program. After extensive questioning to clarify the need, she took two weeks putting it together. When they met to finalize the contract, he no longer wanted to purchase her training. Devastated, she wanted to convince him he was wrong. Instead, she asked one question: not, why did you change your mind; but “Mr. Billings, you were so interested in doing the program when we first spoke. What was it that made you so excited about it two weeks ago?” He began to review his reasons. His enthusiasm built. In 5 minutes, he said, “Let’s do it!” And he did. He had sold himself. “The secret to persuasion is to encourage a person to come up with his or her own answers to questions or solutions to problems. You can do that by asking questions that lead the person in the direction you want him or her to go.”³⁶ She also illustrates the principle by citing “the most successful salesperson who ever worked for Equitable Life Insurance.” For 25 years he sold more than any other. His method was to sit down in the client’s living room, lean over close to them and say, “Tell me, why do *you* need life insurance?”³⁷ “People believe what *they* say, not what *you* say.”³⁸

To apply this principle to an evangelist’s clearly external influence, recall how spirits affect one another. Although Peter asked why Satan had “filled” Ananias’ heart, he also asked “Why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart?” (Acts 5:2-3) Suggestions come from without, but men must bring them to life in themselves before they are “filled” with them. The human evangelist externally presents the common call. Only the Holy Spirit works directly in the elect subject to help him fill his soul, thus germinating the seed with life-giving light. “For with Thee is the fountain of life: in thy light shall we see light” (Psalm 36:9). Questions assist this self-persuasive work within which the Holy Spirit may choose to work.

8. Additionally, questions are a gentle, less offensive way to approach men. “And the servant of the Lord must not strive; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient; in meekness instructing those that oppose themselves; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth; and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will” (II Timothy 2:24-26).

The “Socratic” Method of Selling

Daley’s method, found in *SOCRATIC SELLING: How to Ask the Questions that Get the Sale*, can now be briefly explained and its leading principles observed in a Biblical evangelistic example, indeed the greatest of all time.

Daley begins with *Webster’s New World Dictionary’s* definition of the “Socratic method”:

³⁶ Leeds, op. cit., pp. 157-8.

³⁷ Leeds, op. cit., p. 167.

³⁸ Leeds, op. cit., p. 159.

A method of teaching or discussion, as used by Socrates, in which one asks a series of easily answered questions that inevitably lead the answerer to a logical conclusion...”³⁹

Daley finds three basic “Socratic” principles for selling:

1. **Respect the Customer.** The salesman is a guest in another’s world and he must learn about it by asking questions to shape his dialogue by taking each answer seriously.
2. **Help the Customer Think. Easily answered questions** which appeal to both mind and heart facilitate the dialogue. Then **full-value listening** allows the salesman to demonstrate that he understands the customer and his need. No script is followed. The customer leads. And,
3. **Help the Customer Make Decisions.** The decisions are his following the joint discussion and lead to a conclusion—hopefully, a sale and a mutually beneficial long term relationship.⁴⁰

The actual interview respects the customer, beginning where he is. It opens with “Mr. Jones, *I’m prepared* to talk about____, which we discussed on the phone. If you could give me *your perspective* on that, we can focus the meeting on *what interests you.*” This lays some subject boundaries and invites the customer to express his perspective. It is an offer to focus on what interests him at the time. Easily answered questions then help the salesman understand the client. They are designed to allow the client to draw his own picture and fill in the details. Socratic “Draw” Probes—“Tell me more about...” or “What else would help me understand...”—track the customer’s input and are followed by Socratic “Access” Probes—“How do you handle ____” —to introduce related features not yet included. The needs discussion is never rushed because “the sale is being made during the discovery process.”⁴¹

Emotions are probed to understand irritants (“What bothers you most about this?”), motives for action (“Please tell me how this affects you.”), all the while subconsciously building the client’s trust that the now informed salesman is better equipped to address his needs. The salesman reinforces this perception by summarizing what he has heard and asking “Do I have it right?” or “Am I getting the picture?”

The client is then helped to frame his own solution by the easily answered questions suggested in Rudyard Kipling’s rhyme from *Just-So Stories*:

I keep six honest serving men
(They taught me all I knew.)
They were what, and why, and when,
And how and where and who.

The constructed solution can be made less threatening by “fantasy questions”: “**If you were to go ahead with...when would you..., how would you..., where would you..., etc.**” When the customer is satisfied with the solution he has constructed, the salesman is

³⁹ Daley, op. cit., p.14.

⁴⁰ Daley, op. cit., pp. 14-17.

⁴¹ Daley, op. cit., p. 41.

ready with a proposal that fits it. He summarizes, proposes his offer, asks “How does that sound?” and finds a path to agreement.

With this background, we are ready to consider

The Greatest Evangelistic Interview
The World Has Ever Seen
Conducted By The Greatest Evangelist Ever Known

The best example of successful evangelism is found in the Genesis passage suggested as the evangelistic text. Not only is it a perfect model, it is also absolutely relevant to every man. After Adam’s first sin, Genesis 3 records:

And they heard the voice of the LORD God walking in the garden in the cool of the day: and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the LORD God amongst the trees of the garden. And the LORD God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou? And he said, I heard thy voice in the garden and I was afraid, because I was naked; and I hid myself. And he said, Who told thee that thou wast naked? Hast thou eaten of the tree, whereof I commanded thee that thou shouldest not eat? And the man said, The woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat. And the LORD God said unto the woman, What is this that thou hast done? And the woman said, The serpent beguiled me, and I did eat. And the LORD God said unto the serpent, Because thou has done this...I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel....And Adam called his wife’s name Eve; because she was the mother of all living. Unto Adam also and to his wife did the LORD God make coats of skins, and clothed them. And the LORD God said, “Behold, the man is become as one of us, to know good and evil: and now, lest he put forth his hand, and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever: Therefore the LORD God sent him forth from the Garden of Eden, to till the ground from whence he was taken. So he drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life. (Genesis 3:8-24)

In this evangelistic encounter, the Lord demonstrates the essence of the “Socratic” principles in dealing with our father Adam. He could have justly stormed in with fiery judgment. Instead, He showed **respect for** Adam and Eve, created in **His image**. He entered the garden He had made for them at the convenient time for rest and thought (“in the cool of the day”), sought them out when they hid from Him, and engaged them with a question, even though He already knew everything—where Adam was and what he had done. He then **helped** them **think** through their situation by a series of three more **easily answered questions** that probed the depth of their dilemma. In so doing, He demonstrated **full-value listening**, tracking with their responses and leading them to fully confess their sin (“and I did eat”). The confessions were certainly flawed. Each blamed another, but each was also adequate to show the sincere conviction of sin God mercifully sought. The Holy Spirit clearly restored life and worked repentance in response to the Lord’s call. Our gracious God also **helped them with their decisions**. Of course, they

could not work out on their own the wondrous plan of salvation for “eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love Him” (I Corinthians 2:9, Isaiah 64:4⁴²). Even so, before He spelled out the merciful judgment their sin required, they heard their eager Redeemer frame the Covenant of Grace in the midst of His damning judgment on the serpent: “The seed of the woman” would provide full and final deliverance. He also helped them improve on their fig leaf apron solution to their nakedness by crafting the much more adequate “coats of skins” “and clothed them.” And, He encouraged them by leaving the Cherubim of His presence at the east of the garden to represent the promise of ultimate restoration to Himself. And, even as He justly drove them from the garden, He graciously provided the flaming sword to protect them in their still sin-infected state of imperfect holiness from returning too soon to partake of the Tree of Life.

In all this gracious record of mercy, our God laid out an example, long centuries before Socrates or Socratic selling, of the principles we should utilize in participating with Him in the common call to the sin-laden elect.

The Proposed “Socratic” Evangelistic Use of Genesis 1-3

My proposal is that personal evangelists work with the Holy Spirit to restore lost sinners by using Genesis 1-3 in a “Socratic” style dialogue aimed at helping them think through their standing before God, their plight in sin and the solution an eagerly gracious and merciful God has provided for them in the Covenant of Grace. **Approaching men respectfully** as objects of God’s love because they are created in His image and reflect His sovereignty in controlling their own destinies, the Genesis account, produced by the Holy Spirit, should be used to guide the evangelistic discussion. **Easily answered questions** gently track the teachings of “the light of nature” (WC 21:1) through Genesis 1-2 and help honor God’s goodness and love while preparing to discuss sin. Adam and Eve’s sin serves to both explain the Covenant of Works and allow each of their sons to see his own similar sins. Then the mercy of God in the Covenant of Grace may be shown as it was applied to Adam and offered to his similarly needy sons in Christ. This follows the Spirit’s encouraging pattern of thought so that the evangelist may hope to see the success expressed in Psalm 25:8:

The LORD is good and just;
The way He’ll sinners show
The meek in judgment He will guide
And make His path to know.⁴³

Order of Topics

1. **God** (Genesis 1:1)—Purpose: The purpose in starting the discussion with the topic of God is to focus attention upon the most important Person involved. The evangelist needs

⁴² See Charles Hodge, *An Exposition of the First Epistle to the Corinthians* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, n.d.), pp. 37-38.

⁴³ *The Book of Psalms for Singing* (Pittsburgh: C&C Publications, 1973), Psalm 25C.

to ascertain his host's personal understanding of Who God is so that he may proceed in an useful manner. A high view of the personal God should be the aim of this section. To gain the host's perspective open-ended, probing questions are in order such as "How do you describe God in your own words?", "Some feel closer to God when they are in nature, such as in the woods. Have you had any special experiences or times when you sensed His presence or action?", "What role do you see Him playing in your life?", "What role do you assign to Him in the universe?", "Would you assign Him the role David does in Ps. 57:11?", etc.

2. God as Creator of the World (Genesis 1:1-25)—Purpose: The purpose of this topic of discussion is to exalt God and bring to conscious express "His eternal power and Godhead" which Paul in Romans 1:20 says all can see as well as to continue probing the host's understanding of God, perhaps even introducing discussion of God's triune nature.⁴⁴ Ask the host to express his understanding of the Genesis creation record after reading it together. Questions: "What is God teaching in this passage?" "Do you think this teaches a creation from nothing that was then formally ordered in the days of creation?" "What do you understand by 'the Spirit of God' in verse 2?" "Are you familiar with the Christian teaching about the Trinity?" "Is it possible that such an orderly universe could occur without God's plan or power?" [Perhaps here William Paley's analogy of finding a working watch in the woods and reasoning that an intelligent being must have made it could be used.] "Do not the many interactions of plant and animal life such as the Yucca plant and the Yucca moth's interrelated propagation method fit better with their being created days apart rather than with the idea of millions of years of separate development?" "Do you see any basis for interpreters who say the days of creation are ordered expressly to prepare a creation tailored to man's appearance and needs?" "Could a man have survived adequately without God's previous preparation of this world?" "Could he have survived if the creation had taken place on Mars?" And so forth.

3. God as Communicator (Genesis 1:3)—Purpose: Help the host to grasp that his Creator God has been and is always communicating with him. Questions: "What do you think God's speaking to effect His creation means to us?" "Does God want to communicate with us?" "What do you think He is communicating about Himself through His creation?" "Do you see any relation of this passage to Psalm 19:1-3?" "Do you think God is constantly speaking to us?" "Could this be compared to a gift that always reminds us of a dearly loved friend?" And so forth.

4. God as Man's Creator (Genesis 1:26-30)—Purpose: The host must be brought to see his dependence upon and obligation to God as his Lord because he is His creature. Questions: "To what do you think the 'us' in verse 26 refers?" "Why is man's creation presented as having been so differently from the 'And God said...'" method for the rest of creation?" [Stress should be focused on God's special love and care for man.] "Why would God give man such supremacy over the rest of creation?" "Does this special status for man mean that he has special obligations to God?" "What kind of obligations would you think would be fair in this situation?" And so forth.

⁴⁴ Consider questions based on the plural of *elohim* (God) or on the "Spirit of God."

5. Man as God's Image (Genesis 1:26)—Purpose: The evangelist must again stress man's special situation in God's universe and how that special situation demonstrates God's powerful love and care for him. Questions: "What do you think 'God's image' involves?" "Do Paul's suggestions in Ephesians 4:24 and Colossians 3:10 help us understand how man is in the image of God?" "Do men have some special importance to God?" "Is everyman 'God's image'?" "Are you?" And so forth.

6. God's Sabbath (Genesis 1:31-2:3)—Purpose: The host should understand the perfect completeness of God's creation and the significance of His rest. Questions: "When do workmen rest?" "What does God's rest signify to you?" "Do you think God needed to rest?" "What does it mean by saying that God blessed the seventh day?" "Is it for our benefit that He blessed it?" "Why is rest so important?" "Could you or would you want to work seven days a week?" "Do you observe a Sabbath?" "Why do you think it was included among the Ten Commandments?" And so forth.

7. God's Providence (Genesis 2:4-15)—Purpose: The host should appreciate the ongoing care of God for man and His creation. Questions: "What specific things did God do for Adam when He prepared the Garden of Eden?" "Were all these things necessary for just one man?" "How large do you think the Garden of Eden was?" "Is God's constant care and attention still needed in the world today?" "Does God care constantly for men?" "Do you perceive that He specially cares for you?" "How do you know?" "Would you say this shows some special love for you?" And so forth.

8. The Covenant of Works (Genesis 2:16-17)—Purpose: Now we are ready to discuss the basis and justice of God's dealing with man in a covenant requiring obedience to Him. Stress should be placed on the simplicity and seriousness of this covenant and the excellent prospects man had through simply obeying this one command. Questions: "What did God require in this Covenant of Works?" "Do you think this was a difficult task to achieve in the environment of the Garden of Eden?" "What would have been the outcome if Adam had obeyed the test?" "What was the penalty for failure to obey?" "How serious was that?" "Was it a fair test?" "How does Adam as the first man come to represent all of us?" "Was that fair?" "What effect will this covenant have on Adam's children?" "What alternative to Adam's Headship can you conceive might be fairer?" And so forth.

9. Marriage (Genesis 19-24)—Purpose: To some extent, this topic may be used as a relief from the discussion of the Covenant of Works before taking up the matter of sin. It is also important to use this topic to reinforce God's love and full provision for every one of man's needs. Questions: "Did God really institute marriage?" "What was His purpose in it?"⁴⁵ "Can we call this a covenant?" "What benefits have you found in your own marriage?" "Is marriage the real basis of society?" "What does 'one flesh' mean?" "How do we apply that concept in our society today?" "What are the blessings and benefits of families?" "What did your family mean to you as you were growing up?" "Hasn't God done a wonderful thing for all of us in setting us in families?" And so forth.

10. Sin (Genesis 3:1-7)—Purpose: This topic is obviously a crux for the evangelist. The discussion of the Covenant of Works has laid the ground for considering Adam and Eve's

⁴⁵ This question exhibits the construction of a question based on one of the Spirit's in Malachi 2:15.

sins. These should be considered in the Covenant of Works, but also as examples for the host since it is often easier to see the sins of others more clearly than their own. In the end, the personal sin of the host must be in view. Questions: “What is sin?” “How was the serpent able to engineer Adam’s fall into sin?” “What was the significance of Adam’s sin with its penalty of death?” “Did his sin affect all his children?” “How will this affect the world?” “How does it affect you and I?” “Have you ever felt personal guilt over any particular act you have done?” “Have you considered the Ten Commandments and how they relate to your life?” And so forth.

11. God’s Covenant of Grace (Genesis 3:8-24)—Purpose: The topic of God’s Covenant of Grace in Genesis 3 embraces the continuation of God’s love after Adam’s sin. The passage allows an abundance of examples of God’s amazing mercy. This should be strenuously asserted along with the plan of salvation expressed in Genesis 3:15. Questions: “Why did God have to seek out Adam?” “Could God have justly thundered judgment on Adam?” How did God’s approach to our first parents demonstrate His enormous mercy?” “What is the significance of Adam’s confession, ‘and I did eat?’” “Do you think it was sincere?” “Should it have been more straightforward?” “Do you think that Adam was repentant?” “Did God have to be so merciful to Adam?” “What does it mean that the “seed of the woman” would “bruise the serpent’s head?” “What does John mean when he says, ‘He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil?’” (I John 3:8) “Do you think that Adam accepted the Covenant of Grace?” “Did Adam have to wait for his full salvation?” “How do you see all this relating to you?” “Do you think this Covenant of Grace applies to you as well as to Adam?” “If you were to accept the Covenant of Grace, as Adam did, would you make a sincere, lifelong commitment to remain in it?” “Do you want to make that commitment right now or do you feel you should think about it some more?” And so forth.

Finally, it is important to say that the evangelistic effort is not a one time, one person activity. It may take many meetings and a long time building a relationship—as Lingle suggests—and to achieve a successful commitment. Friendships are often a component in inducing trust in the messenger and his message. It may also take the involvement of other Christians getting to know the potential seeker and welcoming him into the local church or the Christian community (as the Celtic Way envisions) before the Holy Spirit chooses to give life.⁴⁶ Each encounter may not seem to be or actually be wholly successful since sometimes one may “plant” and another “water.” Still it is always God Who “giveth the increase” (I Cor. 3:7). In any event, our labor is never in vain in the Lord. To Him shall be all the glory forevermore. Amen and Amen.

⁴⁶ The ordinary means of grace are all within the corporate church, especially the preaching and teaching of the Word and prayer. It is no loss to the evangelist if he is able to induce his prospect to attend the services of God. These can really be God’s means to cap a successful evangelistic encounter. Please consult D. G. Hart and John R. Muether, *With Reverence and Awe: Returning to the Basics of Reformed Worship* (Phillipsburg, N.J.: P & R Publications, 2002), especially chapter 9 “The Means of Grace, pp. 131-144, and Edmund P. Clowney, *The Church* (Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity Press, 1995). The Word read and especially preached, the sacraments and prayer are the “means by which Christ communicates to us the benefits of redemption” (Westminster Shorter Catechism Q. 88). Those benefits include the “justification, adoption, and sanctification” the evangelist seeks ((WSC Q. 32).

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“SOCRATIC” EVANGELISM
Charles James Butler

This paper offers a method of evangelism based on the “Socratic” method of selling developed by Kevin Daley.

It begins with a survey of various evangelistic methods with which the author is familiar to draw out best practices or major principles to be incorporated in this approach.

From the Christian theological perspective, the importance of working with the Holy Spirit is emphasized and His Genesis 1-3 is selected as relevant to evangelism. Using that passage has the added advantage of keeping the thought processes employed in the evangelical dialogue under His direction and beginning with items He has permitted every man to see in the “light of nature.”

The modern theory for use of questions in communication is laid out to provide practical tools for constructing “Socratic” questions. Then the structural bones of Daley’s application to selling are presented with the suggestion that this pattern is similar to the one God Himself used to evangelize Adam in the first evangelical encounter in history. It is suggested that God’s way be utilized by modern evangelists and that a suggested order of topics from Genesis 1-3 be followed in presenting the gospel. These topics are listed with suggestions of probing questions an evangelist might use.

It is finally suggested that personal evangelism should lead into and utilize the community of believers to achieve lasting positive results.

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