

Picture the Exxon logo. A Greyhound bus. The Coca-Cola bottle. A Frigidaire oven. What do they have in common? An industrial designer named Raymond Loewy. Loewy was an immigrant who arrived in Manhattan in 1919, dreaming that New York would be an elegant and stylish place. When he arrived, he was disappointed. What Loewy found was a grungy product of the industrial age – a city that was "bulky, noisy, and complicated."

Not one to sit idly by and do nothing Loewy decided to change things, designing products that ranged from Lucky Strike cigarette packs to International Harvester tractors. He did "more than almost any person in the 20th century to shape the aesthetic of American culture." During the Kennedy administration, Loewy complained to a friend in the White House that the President's airplane looked "gaudy." Determined to improve it, he spent several hours on the floor of the Oval Office, cutting up shapes of blue paper along with President Kennedy. Finally, he settled on a design for the nose of the plane that has been in place ever since.

So, what was Raymond Loewy's secret? He sensed that consumers are torn between two opposing forces: a curiosity about things that are new, and a fear of anything that is *too new*. As a result, we are attracted to products that are bold, but are also instantly comprehensible. Loewy believed that people want things that are "Most Advanced, Yet Acceptable," a phrase which can be shortened to MAYA.

Think about how MAYA works in your own life. You probably find yourself drawn to the joy of a new discovery. But at the same time you want something familiar, because it makes you feel safe. Nowadays that brand new car you drive off the lot will most likely come with a touch screen inside it. Mine sure did. More than likely many of us are ok with this, because of the iPhone which was introduced back in 2007. Ever since we have been getting familiar with using our fingers to navigate and launch apps from a screen. And because of this it isn't too

radical for us to accept a touch display in our cars. You might say that our Apple and Android phones with their distinctive shape, size, and design have made that new screen in our cars familiar, and therefore we see them as Most Advanced, Yet Acceptable. MAYA!

Raymond Loewy believed that people are torn between a curiosity about new things and a fear of anything too new, and as we explore our Gospel story today we might say that Jesus would probably agree with him. In the temple in Jerusalem, he asks the chief priests and the elders, "Did the baptism of John come from heaven, or was it of human origin?" These religious leaders cannot answer, because whatever they say will land them in a heap of trouble. The people love John because his baptism is new and thrilling. If the priests and elders say, "John's baptism comes from heaven," then Jesus will say to them, "Why then did you not believe him?" In the eyes of Jesus and the people, John's baptism is clearly Most Advanced.

And yet, if the priests and elders say, "John's baptism is of human origin," the crowd will criticize them, because they regarded John as a prophet. The People were comfortable with John because he comes out of a long line of Hebrew prophets, and his baptism is rooted in religious tradition. John is Most Advanced, Yet Acceptable. Because of this, the priests and elders are unable to come to a conclusion, and they say, "We do not know."

As we begin to take some time to understand today's story we learn that Jesus engages in this debate because the religious leaders are questioning his authority. They want to trip him, trap him, and ultimately destroy him. But Jesus slips out of their clutches, at least for now, and I think this is because for a majority of his followers he, like John, is MAYA, Most Advanced, Yet Acceptable. His teachings are both fresh and traditional. In fact after this big debate about authority,

Jesus tells a parable that illustrates his ability to be simultaneously surprising, and yet familiar.

He begins his tale by introducing his listeners, and to us, to a man who has two sons that he has asked to work in his vineyard. The first says, "No, I don't think so," but later he changes his mind and he gets to work. The second says, "Sure, I'll go," but he fails to lift a finger. "Which of the two," asks Jesus, "did the will of his father?" "Duh," say the priests and scribes, "the first." "Truly I tell you," says Jesus, "the tax collectors and the prostitutes are going into the kingdom of God ahead of you."

That kind of thinking was, and is, MA, Most Advanced. Prostitutes going to heaven ahead of priests? Such a design was fresh, bold, and surprising! But Jesus isn't finished. "For John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him," he explains, "but the tax collectors and the prostitutes believed him." That kind of thinking regarding -- the way of righteousness -- was entirely traditional and acceptable. Most people were comfortable with righteousness, and Jesus is saying that both he and John are delivering a message that religious leaders should endorse.

Apparently fresh and traditional is what Jesus is all about. Many people are drawn to his message, including outsiders such as tax collectors and prostitutes, and they respond to his good design. They know MAYA when they see it, and they are buying it. You might even say that because they are following John and Jesus in the way of righteousness, they are able to enter the kingdom of heaven ahead of the chief priests and scribes. Throughout the gospel of Matthew a MAYA Jesus preaches a message that can help us to understand the design that Jesus has for change, righteousness, and love.

First, let's explore our Lord's way of making change work. In his teachings, Jesus offers a fresh but traditional approach to transformation. In his parable of the

two sons, he honors the son who changes his mind and goes into the vineyard to work for his father. More important than his initial response is his willingness to turn himself around and go in the right direction. This is why the tax collectors and prostitutes who repent are miles ahead of the chief priests and scribes. John the Baptist challenged people to "repent, for the kingdom of heaven had come near to them." Jesus follows up with his own invitation to repent. In both cases, repenting means a complete change of mind, an about-face, a 180-degree turn.

The MAYA message of Jesus is that change is always possible. Our futures are not determined by our choices from the past. None of us is trapped in the life we are living right now. Like the first son in the parable, we are free to change our mind and serve our Father. Jesus has designed us for change, despite our tendency to at times resist it.

Next, let's briefly look at Jesus' way, or understanding, of righteousness. In his MAYA message, Jesus criticizes the priests and the scribes by saying, "John came to you in the way of righteousness and you did not believe him." By righteousness, Jesus means having a right relationship with God, and also right relationship with our fellow human beings. It is not a righteousness based on religious obligations, which Jesus makes clear when he criticizes the scribes and Pharisees for being hypocrites. "Woe to you," he says, "for you tithe mint, dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice, and mercy and faith."

MAYA righteousness means right relationship. It is grounded in having faith in God, and in the showing of justice and mercy to our brothers and sisters. In the early church, the Apostle James posed the question of what Christians should do when they see a brother or sister without clothes or daily food. He asked if it is enough to say to them, "Go in peace; keep warm and eat your fill." No, right relationship means that we do what we can to supply their daily needs. Anything

else is not true righteousness. James concluded that "faith by itself, if it has no works, is dead." MAYA Jesus would agree. Remember in last week's parable we learned that we are all called to be workers in God's Kingdom here on Earth, as evidenced by another story about a Vineyard owner inviting everyone to help with the harvest and paying them all the same wage.

Finally, let's also try to understand Jesus and his way of love. In his design for love, Jesus demonstrates again that he is both fresh and traditional. In Matthew 22, Jesus is asked by one of the Pharisees to identify the greatest commandment in the law. Jesus answers, "'You shall love the Lord your God and you shall love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets."

Although this sounds like a new discovery, it is really quite familiar and instantly comprehensible. "Love the Lord your God" comes from Deuteronomy and "love your neighbor as yourself" is a quotation found in Leviticus. The Jesus love-design is attractive because it is both bold and traditional.

In a sense, the love commandment is like the four chords that lie at the heart of many classic pop songs. In a popular online video called "4 Chords," a group of musicians cycle through dozens of songs that are built on the same chord progressions. In a humorous way, they show the similarities between songs as diverse as "Let It Be," "Don't Stop Believin'," "Take Me Home, Country Roads" and "Can You Feel the Love Tonight?" Although these songs are built on the same four chords, they sound nothing alike. Each one is fresh and bold, in its own way. But we are attracted to them because they are built on familiar chords. The same is true for the love commandment of Jesus, which is both new and old at the very same time.

When it comes to religious guidance, we can thank God that Jesus is a great designer. He is kind of like Raymond Leuw! Our Lord and his teachings on

change, righteousness, and love are MAYA, Most Advanced, Yet Acceptable. And so this today and every day we dare embrace them with a Thanks be to God.