The Coffee Manifesto:
Will it Be Starbucks or Sanka?

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I love watching old Andy Griffith shows on DVD from the library. They are a perfect way to unwind after a long day. The DVDs from the library have the original sponsor spots which closed the shows when they aired. These old commercial spots are fun to watch, but one thing really bothers me: Andy Griffith pitched Sanka.

I love Andy Griffith.

I hate Sanka.

Sanka is an example of what should never be done to coffee. Sanka has two nasty qualities, which make it barely qualify as coffee:
1. Sanka is chemically decaffeinated.
2. Sanka is instant coffee.

Coffee should never be robbed of its stimulating effect. This is why most sensible people drink coffee. Rob coffee of its caffeine and you have lost the essence of what coffee is. The only worse thing you can do is to then freeze-dry the coffee so people can make it in an instant.

Coffee is meant to have caffeine. Coffee is meant to be brewed right before you drink it. Sanka is an attack on the essence of coffee. As much as I love Andy Griffith, it pains me to see him hawking this rubbish that no human being should be forced to drink.

Teaching is like coffee, and the same kinds of critical elements that make for good coffee also make for good teaching. The essence of coffee is to stimulate. The essence of teaching is the same.

John Milton Gregory says that the essence of teaching is to stimulate the mind of the student for self-activity. “The true stimulant of the human mind is a question, and the object that does not raise any questions will stir no thought.”

Compare for a moment the stimulating effect of Sanka with a more excellent coffee – Starbucks. Drink Sanka and you are ready to fall asleep. Drink Starbucks and you’re ready to take on the world.

What is the effect of your teaching on your students? Does it call for action, stimulate thought, excite the mind, get the life ready for response?

**Good coffee takes time to roast and brew properly.** Starbucks roasts their beans until the bitterness is gone and the complexity of flavors can be fully tasted. If the beans are
not roasted as long, the bitterness of the raw bean remains and the complex and more subtle flavors of the bean cannot emerge. Yet even properly roasted coffee beans must be ground and brewed properly, too. BUNN coffee makers can brew a pot of coffee in just 2-3 minutes, but coffee grounds need to be exposed to hot water dripping through them for 6-6.5 minutes for ideal results.

Like good coffee, good teaching cannot be rushed. It takes time to stimulate the minds of our students to inquire, discover, know, understand, appreciate and apply the complex truths we have to teach them. The bitter flavors of a rush to judgment, a quick and dirty answer, will dominate teaching that is rushed. The more subtle and complex flavors of contemplation, genuine understanding, appreciation, delight, discrimination, and transformation take much longer to emerge and can be overwhelmed by cheaper and easier and much less transformative elements if teachers do not have patience with the teaching process.

**Good coffee is roasted and brewed carefully**, with attention to detail and discrimination. Roasted coffee has over 1,000 flavor and aroma compounds. Only 30 of these make the best-tasting coffee.

Likewise, good teaching must be careful and discriminatory. The world is full of thousands of ideas. Most of them will not make our students think God’s thoughts after Him. They will poison, rather than enhance, their ability to live a life that pleases God. The teacher must be careful and pay attention to detail so as not to confuse, overwhelm or dishearten students.

**Good coffee can stand on its own or can be enhanced and enjoyed with a variety of flavors added to it.** Starbucks comes in different roasts and brews and adding flavored syrups and creamers makes it taste even better without obscuring the essence of what makes the coffee excellent. Cheap coffee, on the other hand, needs flavor enhancers to try to mask the cheap and bitter quality of the coffee.

Quality teaching also speaks for itself. It can come in a variety of subject areas (or “roasts”) – history, English, math, languages, etc. Each of them, while varying from each other, can still be recognized as excellent teaching with the same core essence – stimulating the mind of the student to self-action, discovery and understanding with patience and discrimination. Teaching can be flavored with field trips, feasts, celebrations, videos, games, etc. These additions make excellent teaching even more enjoyable. Poor teachers try to mask poor teaching with videos, games, and field trips (often meaningless ones), trying to compensate for poor teaching by adding lots of flavorful fun. This may amuse some students, but it cannot really make up for the fact that the teaching itself in its essence is poor and does not stimulate the minds of students to quality thinking and acting.

**Good coffee must be properly strong**, as even quality coffee is not very good when it is too weak. The more coffee grinds you use, the more complex and robust the flavors you can produce. Of course, you can also make coffee that is too strong.
Good teaching must also be delivered at the appropriate strength. Teachers need to be assertive, bold, joyful and confident. They should lead and guide their class from a position of strength, not weakness. Of course, a teacher can be overbearing – too strong – and overwhelm their students and keep them from being able to properly express themselves, ask questions, discover the truth for themselves and exercise dominion over their piece of God’s creation. So teaching, like coffee, must be properly strong but not overly assertive.

**Finally, when good coffee is brewing, it is enticing.** The aroma of good coffee draws people to it – even people who don’t drink coffee. In fact, I have heard many people smell good coffee brewing and say, “I wish I drank coffee.”

So also, good teaching should be enticing. It should attract students to the truth. It should make them want to have a drink from the fountain of knowledge. As our teaching entices students, we can then equip them to be life-long learners because they will want to learn and to love to learn.

God has given us the highest privilege – to stimulate the minds of our students to know God’s truth, to embrace His goodness, to love His beauty. We have been called by God to entice our students to the highest truths, the greatest goods. We have the opportunity to make an eternal difference in the life of a child made in the image of God. Our students are looking for something to believe, for someone to follow. They want to be stimulated. The real question for us, as educators, is simple: What will we offer them – Starbucks or Sanka?