Take Action:
Which Is More Important?



At a Glance:
In this activity, students will debate whether the will or the understanding is more important. Two chairs, set on opposite sides of the room, represent the two points of view. Only students seated in these chairs may speak. As they speak, the other students move from one side of the room to another as they are swayed by different arguments.

Supplies Needed:
- 2 chairs set facing each other on opposite sides of a room
- space around each chair for students to gather
- copy of *Which Is More Important?* readings for each student

Directions:

1. Introduce the consideration of whether the will or the understanding is more important by asking students to discuss one of the examples listed below. Try to keep the dialog open-ended by suggesting alternative points of view if the group seems to strongly veer one way or the other.
    - Which is the best way to create a more peaceful world? 1) Study conflict resolution and write a book about it? 2) Join a peace march
    - If someone yells at you is it better to 1) defend yourself and yell back 2) ask the person to clearly explain why he or she is upset
    - If you see a beggar on the street should you 1) Give him money right away 2) Donate to a local charity that might help him
    - Which is the best way to help someone you see in a road accident? 1) Call 911 and wait for expert help? 2) Jump out of your car and do what you can?



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Which Is More Important?
Continued

2. Hand out the *Which Is More Important?* page and read it together as a group.
3. Explain that the two chairs represent two different points of view. Designate one as standing for the position "The will is more important than the understanding" and the other as standing for the position, "The understanding is more important than the will."
4. Ask for an initial volunteer to speak to each position. Have them sit in the chairs and take turns speaking. As each person speaks, the students should move to stand with whichever speaker they agree with at the time. Students may move freely and change points of view as often as they wish
5. When a speaker has finished, he or she gets up from the chair. Anyone who wants to speak may sit in the chair. The two sides alternate in speaking. Students may change sides as often as they wish, including speaking on both points of view.
6. When the discussion seems to have ended, bring the group back together and ask whether the exercise has given them a new perspective. If time allows, discuss the questions at the bottom of the readings page.

- Have you ever known someone whose will really seemed to predominate over his or her understanding? Or whose understanding seemed to predominate? Describe what the person was like. How did you feel about his or her behavior?

- Do we need one ability—the will or the understanding—more than the other? Is one or the other more important to our spiritual life?

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Which Is More Important?

The true ideas that live within us must become what we will or desire and act upon before our inner self can be united with our outer self. . . .

Action comes first, our willing or desiring follows. For what we first do from the understanding, we later do from the will, and finally we put it on as a habit. It is then made part of our inner self. Once this has happened, we no longer do good from truth, but from good. For we then begin to see the happiness that exists in doing the truth and to see something of what heaven is like. This spiritual insight remains with us after death, and by means of it we are lifted up into heaven by the Lord.

(See *Arcana Coelestia* 4353.)

Faith—which also means truth—is first in time, but charity—which also means good—is first in intention or purpose. Whatever is first in intent is really first, because it is primary and so also the first-born. Whatever happens first in time is not really first, but only seems to be. To make this more understandable, let's look at analogies with building a church, building a house, laying out a garden, and preparing a field for planting a crop.

The first thing in time in building a church is laying the foundations, building the walls, putting the roof on, and then putting an altar inside and constructing a pulpit. But the first thing in intention is the worship of God in the church, which is the reason why the other things are done.

The first thing in time in building a house is making its outer structure, and then filling it with all the necessities of life [such as furniture and appliances]. But the first thing in purpose is to create a convenient dwelling for oneself and the other people who are going to live in the house.

The first thing in time in laying out a garden is leveling the ground, preparing the soil, and planting trees and sowing seeds to raise useful plants. But the first thing in intention is what can be gained from these things [such as food to eat, a beautiful place to sit in, etc.].

The first thing in time in preparing a field is leveling the ground, plowing, harrowing, and then sowing; but the first thing in intention is the crop and the use that the crop will serve.

(See *True Christian Religion* 336.)

1. Have you ever known someone whose will really seemed to predominate over his or her understanding? Or whose understanding seemed to predominate? Describe what the person was like. How did you feel about his or her behavior?

2. Do we need one ability—the will or the understanding—more than the other? Is one or the other more important to our spiritual life?