
Considering the Implications of the Epistemological Crisis In Regard To Christian Education and Pastoral Care

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Introduction

Chances are that you have never heard of an epistemological crisis. Don't worry I will be the first to confess that the terminology is a bit confusing. Even though the terminology is confusing, it is a very common occurrence in the church and every pastor should familiarize himself with it.

A common example that authors have shared in describing an epistemological crisis is with a story of a wife discovering a hand written note from another women in the pants pocket of her husband. The note says, "*I Love You.*" This new knowledge, if accepted, has drastic consequences. In other words, the inescapable result of these three simple words on a note will bring into question the truthfulness of what her husband says about their marriage and the status of the marriage. The note will also bring into question her marriage values, her behavior and feelings towards her whole family. The conflict between her prior knowledge and the new knowledge collide, which creates an epistemological crisis. As a result of the collision, she may accept the new knowledge, which could potentially bring about an alternative reality and reveal that she has been living in a lie for countless years. She may also reject the new knowledge or try to rationalize it away so that things will stay relatively the same, with the exception of possible lingering doubts. Painfully she may choose to neither fully accept nor reject the note but try to absorb the new knowledge into her prior knowledge, thus attempting to hold the two truths together in an obviously painful contradictory unit.

As we can see from our example above, epistemological crises have large ramifications for individuals and this is also true for churches. As we will see in the following sections of this document, when the Scriptures are continually revealed to the church, parishioners will also experience epistemological crises. These crises will occur

as God's truth conflicts with and undercuts other sources of truth that they accept and perceive to be the norm. Thus this subject demands our utmost attention for proper and compassionate pastoral care and competent Christian education.

What Is Epistemology?

To begin we better define the word, epistemology. Epistemology is the study of how a person obtains knowledge and how a person assesses and learns from that knowledge.¹ Epistemology "deals with questions of knowledge: What is truth? What are the sources of knowledge? How do we know? Concerns of this sort probe into the nature and validity of human knowledge."² Epistemology is important for it "presents the theory of knowing and knowledge and therefore is closely related to teaching and learning."³ While an epistemology is the theory of how a person acquires truth, an epistemological system or an epistemological framework is that which encompasses a person's sources of knowledge and the manner in which a person acquires knowledge. Otherwise stated, each person's epistemological framework can be thought of as a knowledge system that gathers data from one source or a plethora of sources and does so in various ways, such as:

- Authority (e.g., How do I know? Because Albert Einstein told me.)
- Pragmatism (e.g., How do I know? Because I welded it up that way in my shop, tried it out in the field, and it has never failed me since.)

¹ The two parts of the word Epistemology are episteme and ology. Episteme means "knowledge and understanding" and ology means "study of."

² William C. Reitschel, *An Introduction to the Foundations of Lutheran Education* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 46.

³ Warren S. Benson, "Philosophical Foundations of Christian Education" in *Introducing Christian Education: Foundations for the Twenty-first Century*, ed. Michael J. Anthony, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Publishing Group, 2001), 27.

- Conventional wisdom (e.g., How do I know? Because nearly everyone in my community thinks so.)
- Observation (e.g., How do I know? Because I was there and saw it for myself.)
- Senses (e.g., How do I know? Because I touched it, and it felt hot, and it smelled as if something were burning.)
- Logic (e.g., How do I know? Because, since A was greater than B, and B was greater than C, I concluded that A was greater than C.)
- Empiricism (e.g., How do I know? Because many studies that used very large samples of the total population of people who have this disease confirm a high statistical correlation between salt intake and the aggravation of this disease.)
- Revelation (e.g., How do I know? For the Bible tells me so; or, thus saith the Lord.)

Consequently, the knowledge that we gather answers ontological questions such as the existence of God, the meaning of being human, and the nature of truth/reality.

Now, keep in mind that people's epistemological workings are often undiagnosed. The gathering and formation of knowledge often happens subconsciously. Even though the working of a person's gathering and acquiring of knowledge happens intuitively, it does impact each and every one of us.⁴ The knowledge system forms and influences how a person views the world and reality.⁵ Simply put, a person's epistemological framework supplies data and truth (*i.e. knowledge*) to one's worldview.

⁴ T.R. Halvorson (Personal Communication, July 27th of 2012), "*Although most people have never heard of epistemology, everyone has an epistemology that usually combines several sources of knowledge or bases of knowledge, sometimes using them sort of mashed together, and other times alternating between them. This is a lack of epistemological self-consciousness: having an epistemology, but not being conscious of what it is; deciding whether I know something, but not being conscious of how I made that decision. We could call this implicit or unself-conscious epistemology, as opposed to explicit epistemology.*"

⁵ According to Paul Hiebert on page 85 of his book, *Transforming Worldviews*, a person's epistemology or knowledge system is embedded in worldviews.

What Is A Worldview?

The next question that arises is, “What is a worldview?” A worldview is a person’s perception of reality. In other words, each person views the world through a particular lens, these lenses “are deep, they are generally unexamined and largely implicit. Like glasses, they shape how we see the world, but we are rarely aware of their presence. In fact, others can often see them better than we ourselves do.”⁶ According to Paul Hiebert, our worldviews provide us with “mental models of deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or pictures and images that shape how we understand the world and how we take action.” I have heard it said that worldviews provide *maps* of how we view reality and life.

Epistemological Circularity And Feelings

How are epistemological systems and worldviews related? People’s epistemological frameworks ‘form’ their worldview and their worldviews ‘inform’ their epistemological frameworks. They both are connected, intertwined, and create what is called ‘circularity.’ In other words, the knowledge system forms the lens and the lens processes and delivers knowledge back to the system. Around and around they go, working together.⁷

A person’s epistemological framework lies at the foundation of the person, followed by a person’s worldview. As previously stated, they ‘form’ and ‘inform’ each other in a circular fashion. As an outpouring of this circular relationship, manifested

⁶ Paul Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding Of How People Change* (Baker Academic, 2008), 46.

⁷ Alasdair MacIntyre, “Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science,” in *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1989), 140.

feelings, values, linguistics, and practices emerge from the person's worldview. Therefore, what we see on the surface is a person's behavioral patterns, values, practices, and feelings that are shaped from a worldview that is formed by one's epistemological system. The reason why this is important to understand is that behind a person's feelings, practices, and behaviors always lays another two layers.⁸

Worldview Conflicts

What happens when two individuals with two opposing worldviews interact?

Hiebert answers this, saying:

We are similarly largely unaware of our own worldview and how it shapes our thoughts and actions. We simply assume that the world is the way we see it, and that others see it in the same way. We become conscious of our worldviews when they are challenged by outside events they cannot explain.⁹

Until people's worldviews are held up in comparison with others', they are relatively unaware of their own points of view. The interaction with an opposing perspective of reality causes the people to self-reflect on their own lenses making them attentive to their own points of view. Take, for instance, Jesus interacting with the crowds in John 6. The day after Jesus miraculously multiplied fish and bread, the people in the crowds came again to Jesus seeking more miraculous gifts of multiplied fish and bread—not Jesus, the bread of life. As a result, a worldview conflict happened as Jesus confronted those who were seeking a mere bread king and not the bread of life. He challenged the way that they perceived Him, saying, "Truly, truly, I say to you,

⁸ Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change*, 85.

⁹ Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change*, 47.

you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loves.”¹⁰ Jesus was exposing their faulted worldviews in relationship to Him.

When these worldviews are challenged by events and situations that are too difficult to comprehend, great anxiety can come forth. Hiebert comments on this, saying:

To question worldviews is to challenge the very foundations of life, and people resist such challenges with deep emotional reactions. There are few human fears greater than a loss of a sense of order and meaning. People are willing to die for their beliefs if these beliefs make their deaths meaningful.¹¹

In general, worldview conflicts do and should happen in individuals regardless of whether or not they are transitioning into a new denomination. As parishioners interact with each other, there will be point-of-view collisions. Furthermore, as a pastor faithfully preaches the Scriptures and applies the Word to the flock, he will be laying forth a particular way of viewing the world that has been shaped by the truths of the Scriptures. The grand meta-narrative of the Scriptures will form the parish continually, as well as the pastor’s own worldview. Therefore, we should not be surprised when the Scriptures conflict with assumptions in the church, due to worldviews that have not been formed solely by the Bible. As previously stated, many times worldviews of parishioners are formed by the Scriptures ‘and’ a variety of other influences in life, such as personal experiences, cultural norms, the media, traditions, folk Christian theology, and so forth.

Defending A Worldview

When a person’s worldview is confronted, don’t be surprised when defenses are raised. As shared by Hiebert, there will be deep emotional reactions when a person is

¹⁰ John 6:26 (ESV).

¹¹ Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change*, 85.

confronted. Furthermore, Hiebert shares that there will be long-lasting and powerful themes in place to reinforce a person's worldview when conflict arises. The themes will act as a defense mechanism, defending and reinforcing their particular point of view. Therefore, as a pastor don't be surprised when a Biblical worldview is minimized or rationalized away, or even reinterpreted to fit into the parishioner's own worldview. The tension must be resolved and these themes must reinforce and comfort the parishioner telling them that their current worldview is sufficient, accurate and that their way of viewing reality is legitimate.¹²

The Result Of Worldview Conflict: Questioning The Epistemological Knowledge System

If people's worldviews cannot be defended through their own powerful themes, and if the opposing reforming perspective cannot be rationalized away, then the conflict will force the people to examine their epistemological knowledge systems that lie beneath their long-held worldviews.

Keep in mind that a worldview is formed by the epistemological knowledge system. Therefore, when the worldview is challenged, the next logical step is to investigate the knowledge system and the source from which it flows. Commenting on how worldview conflicts cause us to go back and rethink our epistemologies, I believe William Willimon summarizes it best:

Christian thought is a collision with the world's epistemologies, a challenge to worldly ways of making sense. Once we have said something such as, 'Jesus is Lord,' or 'The church is God's answer to what is wrong with the world,' or 'The Bible is truthful in a way that, say, the United States Constitution is not,' then we

¹² Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change*, 59.

must go back and rethink much that we have taken for granted. This is the task of all teaching that is Christian.¹³

Indeed, a person can muddle on through life without a consistent, harmonious, and united epistemological framework due to justifications often subconsciously being enacted to neutralize the co-existence of conflicting sources of truth. Thus, taking time to think about conflicting epistemological sources does not always happen and probably is always, at least more often than not, provoked by a worldview crisis, which then leads to another crisis: a crisis of epistemology.

The Epistemological Crisis

As previously mentioned, if there is a conflict over worldviews and the powerful themes imbedded within those worldviews cannot defend them, the conflict will bleed back into the realm of the epistemological system, where knowledge and its source will be questioned. Most likely, what one will find behind opposing worldviews are opposing epistemological systems and opposing sources of knowledge. The clash between the two creates an epistemological crisis. John Wright shares with us that an epistemological crisis occurs when

a person's narrative account is no longer an adequate account for the data at hand. . . . The collapse of a previously held narrative brings with it a new and often awkward self-consciousness and vulnerability . . . An epistemological crisis grants a self-knowledge that otherwise would escape our own understanding of ourself. As in tragedy, we stand exposed in front of new data. The new data interrogates us.¹⁴

¹³ William H. Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 220.

¹⁴ John Wright, *Telling God's Story: Narrative Preaching for Christian Formation* (Intervarsity Press: IVP Academic, 2007), 41.

From personal experience, I can attest that worldview conflicts are uncomfortable, however, an epistemological crisis can be paralyzing. Wright states, “The pain of an epistemological crisis, while ultimately helpful, initially sends shock waves through individuals and congregations.”¹⁵

Essentially what is at stake in an epistemological crisis is the assessment and comparison of two or more different and competing sources of knowledge. These different sources of knowledge yield different assumptions that yield different worldviews that will yield different behavioral patterns and feelings. Thus, it is evident the profound impact and far-reaching scope of this crisis.

Looking back to John 6, after the worldview conflict occurred between Jesus and the people, it is interesting to see that the people began to question Jesus. In this text it can be observed that the people are trying to make sense of the worldview collision. Their questions, though, did not result in a successful worldview defense but resulted in Jesus injecting divine truths into their epistemological system. This not only resulted in their worldviews being exposed as erroneous, but it also resulted in an epistemological crisis where the people grumbled about Jesus and His teachings. Their grumbling eventually led to the beginning of their epistemological defense, where they questioned Jesus Himself: “Is not this Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How does he now say, ‘I have come down from heaven?’”¹⁶

¹⁵ Ibid, 43.

¹⁶ John 6:42 (ESV).

Epistemological Defense

When pastors and educators in the church proclaim and teach the Word of God they are continually introducing new knowledge from the Scriptures into the frameworks of their parishioners and students. Because God's ways are not like man, the revelation of God's wisdom in the cross will continually bring about an epistemological crisis in the church, as it should. Simplistically put God's revelation will contend with other sources of knowledge gathered by parishioners. Individuals in the church will face a crossroad when the Word comes into direct conflict with knowledge that they have obtained from other sources. According to Alasdair MacIntyre, the "conflict tests the resources of each contending tradition."¹⁷

Because it is difficult for a parishioner to live within the ongoing tension of an epistemological crisis, the crisis will have to be solved or neutralized. What can and often does happen is that individuals will compartmentalize their longstanding knowledge in such a way to remove it from the conflict. This epistemological defense is a way that allows an individual's current knowledge and tradition to be free from being challenged or found to be in conflict with the reintroduced statement of faith.¹⁸ Like the

¹⁷ MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science," in *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, 147.

¹⁸ The motives behind an epistemological defense tactic can vary from paralyzing fear over the potential loss of one's source of truth to the sinful nature simply opposing God's revealed Word. Also pride and self-investment can prevent individuals from being receptive to God's Word. In other words, too much might be at stake for the individual to accept the new knowledge. The new Biblical knowledge would unravel and expose years of behavioral actions that were a result of a faulty worldview and a faulty knowledge source. The cost is simply too much.

defense that happens with one's worldview, this epistemological defense accomplishes the same results by preventing the necessary epistemological crisis from happening.¹⁹

John 6 and Luke 4 capture the most serious of epistemological defenses, the rejection of Jesus Christ.

John 6 is the less intense example of an epistemological defense that entails the disciples only leaving Jesus. After hearing further teachings from Jesus and continual grumbling, verse sixty states, "When many of the disciples heard it, they said, 'This is a hard saying; who can listen to it?'" Then verse sixty-six states, "After this many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him." Therefore, John, chapter six, is an example of an epistemological defense where the individuals disregard Jesus and leave him, which then eliminates their epistemological crises, worldview tensions, and cognitive dissonances.

Luke 4 on the other hand, is a much more intense epistemological defense. In verses sixteen and following it states that Jesus is in Nazareth on the Sabbath reading Scripture to the synagogue assembly. In applying the Scriptures, He showed the people that they could not put God's grace into their debt. He essentially declared that God's grace was not and is not dispensed due to nationality, religious heritage, ethnic heritage, cultural values, pious actions, sincerity, repentance, and so forth. As a result, "When they heard these things, all in the synagogue were filled with wrath. And they rose up and drove him out of the town and brought him to the brow of the hill on which

¹⁹ MacIntyre, "Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science," in *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, 147.

their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff.”²⁰ In this second example of an epistemological defense, the synagogue did not disregard or leave Jesus, as was the case in John 6. Rather, the synagogue confronted the invading message by attempting to eliminate the message (i.e., murder Jesus), in order to reduce the epistemological crisis, worldview tension, and cognitive dissonance that they had encountered.

While both of these Biblical examples are regrettable, as we consider those who rejected Christ, they are indeed examples of groups of people attempting to bring about resolution, even though their solutions were not favorable from a Christian perspective. The following section, though, will cover epistemological resolution from a positive perspective, as an individual transitions into a new epistemological system.

Epistemological Transition

If the knowledge and teachings from the Word of God deconstructs and overrides the established epistemological framework, the person will experience what is called an epistemological transition. MacIntyre states that the person’s “narrative will be brought to a point at which questions are thrust upon the narrator which make it impossible for him to continue to use it as an instrument of interpretation.” In other words, God’s revelation of His Word will make it impossible for the person to depend on their previous manmade knowledge source and system. As a result, the previous sources of knowledge are rejected and the Biblical narrative is received, which results in a change to their worldview and a change to their behavior structure, values and feelings.²¹ Like

²⁰ Luke 4:28-29 (ESV)

falling Dominos, the epistemological transition resulting from the Word impacts all aspects of the person's life.

Epistemological Resolution

After the epistemological transition has occurred, resolution takes place.

MacIntyre comments on how this epistemological crisis is resolved. He states that the new information must enable “the agent to understand both how he or she could intelligibly have held his or her original beliefs and how he or she could have been so drastically misled by them.”²² Within epistemological resolution, the individual then processes the old knowledge and its source in light of the new knowledge and his new worldview. During the crisis the person did not experience a comprehensive equilibrium where there was rest and continuity between the sources of his knowledge, his framework, his worldview and his behavioral patterns. In this epistemological resolution stage he now experience symmetry, which then allows him to reflect upon the journey that he has taken and the errors that he believed. As reflection happens, a wide variety of emotions may emerge, such as regret over the old system, anger about believing old knowledge, embarrassment over possible naivety, relief that the crisis is over, joy with their new perspective and excitement over seeing things from a fresh perspective.²³

²¹ In Biblical terms the epistemological transition is known as repentance and conversion. It is a change of mind and a change in direction. As Christians we have major conversions and we can be converted daily. According to Robert Overgaard (Personal Communication, 29 July 29 2012), “*The word for repentance, a change of mind, is a rich term... It is richer than just knowledge because it takes into account the dimension of righteousness that leads to understanding truth and the need for a cleansing from blindness.*”

²²MacIntyre, “Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science,” in *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*, ed. Stanley Hauerwas and L. Gregory Jones, 140-141.

Two Biblical examples of epistemological transition and resolution are the life of Paul and specifically his encounter with the people of Athens in Acts 17.

As we read of the life of Paul, it is apparent that a radical epistemological transition occurred as he literally journeyed via the Damascus Road from his life in Judaism into his life under Christ. Paul's resolve in being a Christian comes forth zealously as he continually compares and contrasts his life under Judaism with his life under Christ in his writings.²⁴

Another example of an epistemological transition is the Apostle Paul's encounter with the Athenians in Acts 17:22. While in front of the Areopagus, Paul attempted to shift the Athenians' morally insignificant narrative to a morally significant narrative. In doing so, he laid forth a platform to talk about God's judgment and the resurrection of the dead. As a result, an epistemological defense occurred among the Athenians. Some people scoffed at him; the beginnings of epistemological transition occurred for others who said, "We will hear you again about this."²⁵

²³ There is a colloquial term used by Calvinist Christians called, "*The Cage Stage*." In this stage Calvinists contend that due to a person's intense epistemological zeal (*i.e. zeal resulting from the epistemological transition from Arminianism to Calvinism*) that the best place for them is in a cage. Reformed Baptist James White comments on this saying, "*I've seen it many times. The Cage Stage. A believer's eyes are opened to the majesty of God as the sovereign King of the universe, and their entire life is turned upside down. And for a while, they have more zeal than they have knowledge. We call it the "cage stage." That period in the experience of the new Calvinist where they would be better off kept in a cage until they can gain enough maturity to handle these vitally important topics aright. That time when they are more likely to hurt themselves, and others! You know, when they are all running around smacking someone upside the head with Pink's The Sovereignty of God?*" (<http://www.aomin.org/aoblog/index.php?itemid=2269&catid=4>, Retrived July 28th of 2012)

²⁴ See Philippians 2:6-16.

²⁵ Acts 17:32 (ESV).

The Implications of Epistemological Source and Worldview upon Linguistics

Words communicate; they deliver information, express feelings, inspire others, give guiding protection, teach, and so forth. It is amazing that “mere puffs of wind should allow men to discover what they think and feel, to share their attitudes and plans, to anticipate the future and learn from the past, and to create lasting works of art.”²⁶

Indeed words are not mere puffs of wind or sheer sounds with vacuous meaning, but rather they

exercise a wholesome power over our souls, not to control and coerce but to form and to teach, to bring our lives to the point where we may speak the truth and thereby engage in the work of thought. And if our souls are shaped by words, then words can give adequate expression to what is in them. Indeed, words are just the thing we need to be human, creatures made in the image of God who speaks the truth.²⁷

This wholesome power of external words is especially realized with respect to the Word of God, for God’s Word “is not a unidimensional, flat, interior, intellectual word. It is a dynamic, eventful Word that goes forth from God into the real world with powerful effects.”²⁸ God’s word is effectual; God’s Word makes all things out of nothing; the Word is alive and active.²⁹ The Word of God is “energized by the Holy Spirit.”³⁰ Yes indeed,

²⁶ Eugene H. Peterson, “First Language,” *Theology Today* 42 (July 1985): 221.

²⁷ Phillip Cary, *Outward Signs: The Powerlessness of External Things in Augustine’s Thought* (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2008), xii.

²⁸ Jacob A. O. Preus, *Just Words: Understanding the Fullness of the Gospel* (St. Louis, MO: Concordia Publishing House, 2000), 17.

²⁹ See Romans 10:17 and Hebrews 4:12.

³⁰ Preus, *Just Words: Understanding the Fullness of the Gospel*, 18.

“all words are eventful, only the Word of God is fully creative and powerful. The Word of God is theologically eventful because in it God is a work doing what only He can do.”³¹

Besides giving shape and meaning, words also express a person’s reason within a specific cultural context. They express truth claims and are manifested signs of people exercising their own reason.³² Thus, words communicate more than descriptive information; they are declarative. Robert Sokolowski comments on the declarative use of speech saying:

it captures and expresses me, the rational agent, right in the actual exercise of my reason. It is time-specific and indexical. It is a kind of pinnacle in the manifestation of the person, the person at work here and now. It exhibits me exercising my power to be truthful. . . . Declarative speech gives us the primary intuition of the personal in its actual presence, the rational in its actual exercise, and the original distinction of the person from his context.³³

As stated by Sokolowski, words are manifestations of a person’s reason. Reason, though, is embedded in a particular worldview and sourced from particular epistemological sources. So words are not independent or autonomous, but have layers of depth behind them and in them. For example, the Word of God is not only effectual, but it also supplies meaning to the Christian’s use and implementation of words. Otherwise stated, Biblical words are encoded with meaning. Both the origin of Biblical words and the meaning attached to these words are derived from the Scriptures, accordingly forming the Christian’s Biblical semantic package. Furthermore, the Holy

³¹ Ibid.

³² Robert Sokolowski, *Phenomenology of the Human Person* (New York, NY: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 13.

³³ Ibid, 15.

Spirit, through the Word, converts the Christian's syntax by training him how to talk about God, himself, and his neighbor.³⁴

All of this is important to understand because if a person's epistemological source changes or slightly yields to a different epistemological source, the person's epistemic assumptions will change as well. This alters the framework from which language manifests itself. Otherwise specified, encroaching foreign epistemological sources will impact the semantics of words, which then impacts the syntax of sentences, which then impacts the meaning of sentences, and so forth.

Different worldviews and epistemologies are also important to note in respect to receiving and interpreting words. As already stated, both the origin of Biblical words and the meaning attached to these words are derived from the Scriptures, accordingly forming a person's Biblical semantic package. However, a person who adheres or gives way to non-Biblical epistemological sources will advertently/inadvertently use un-Biblical semantic assumptions to decode Biblical words, hence yielding/interpreting different word meanings. Otherwise stated, these different semantic presuppositions in essence will change the meaning of a received Biblical message by recoding various Biblical words with the listener's own meanings. This semantic reconfiguration has far reaching implications into the realms of syntax, sentence meaning, and so forth.³⁵

Besides semantic reconfiguration, the message of the Bible also may be susceptible to inferences that come about due to a hearer's supplemental context.

³⁴ Eugene Peterson, *Answering God: The Psalms as Tools for Prayer* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1989), 42-43.

³⁵ John Searle, "Philosophy of Language: Lecture 6," [n.d.], video clip, accessed 14 July 2013, YouTube, <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vbwAzu8k76c>.

Hearers have networks of information, backgrounds of information, and specific contexts of time and place that they utilize in understanding incoming messages from others.³⁶ Rather than interpreting a Biblical message according to its own semantics, syntax, time, place, and context, a person may regrettably absorb the Biblical message into his own context (i.e., what does this text mean to me, rather than what is this text saying). This will result in a change of the original meaning of the message, which then leads the person to “infer something neither explicitly stated nor necessarily implied.”³⁷

The Implications of Epistemological Source and Worldview upon Emotions

The last dimension that needs to be addressed is that of emotions. Like linguistics, emotions flow out of and from a person’s epistemological sources and worldviews. While emotions are governed by a person’s epistemological sources and worldview, emotions are also manifestations of a person’s particular epistemological sources and worldview within or in connection to diverging epistemologies and worldviews. Hiebert states, “On the surface, feelings are manifested through material objects and behavioral patterns, which are often shaped by people’s worldviews.”³⁸ Generally speaking, emotions will trend negatively in the event of cognitive dissonance and dissymmetry, and they will trend positively in the event of cognitive harmony and symmetry. While negative feelings may result due to a worldview or epistemological

³⁶ Ibid.

³⁷ W.F. Brewer, “Memory for the Pragmatic Implications of Sentences,” *Memory and Cognition* 27 (1977): 673.

³⁸ Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change*, 85.

crisis, one needs to guard from assuming that the negative feelings are evidence that the crisis is bad. Conversely, positive feelings in connection with various foreign messages and worldviews does not constitute that the foreign messages and worldviews are indeed whole and true. Simply put, feelings are not always a good standard for judging sin, righteousness, and truth. If they were a valid standard, the world would fall hostage to moral relativism, where everybody's individual feelings would constitute what is right and what is wrong.

The Scriptures are full of emotions, such as joy, trust, fear, surprise, sadness, disgust, anger, and anticipation.³⁹ Many of these emotions come forth within the Biblical narratives when either positive or negative interaction happens between Biblical characters. However, there are other times when specific Biblical truths and revelations from God invade the person's epistemological system and worldview, which results in the outpouring of emotions. Several examples include, but are not limited to: the rich young man going away grieving after Jesus called Him to sell all that he had and follow Him in Matthew 19; the high priest tearing his cloak after hearing Jesus confess that He was the Messiah in Matthew 26; and Mary Magdalene, Mary the mother of James, and Salome fleeing the empty tomb with terror and amazement following the message of the young man dressed in a white robe in Mark 16.

The emotional patterns of those becoming Lutheran need to be studied. While emotions are indeed manifestations of a much deeper framework, these manifestations will draw attention to areas of importance to be further studied, areas where

³⁹ Robert Plutchik, "The Nature of Emotions," July-August 2001, <http://web.archive.org/web/20010818040222/http://americanscientist.org/articles/01articles/plutchikcap6.html> (4 July 2013).

epistemological shifts and worldview changes may be occurring. In Chapter Five of this manuscript I will investigate emotional trends of those who are making the shift into Lutheran thought.

Pastoral and Educational Conclusions

As pastors and educators, we have the great privilege of proclaiming and teaching the Word of God. The cross is the source of our epistemological system, not experience and not the wisdom of the world. We stand underneath the scriptures and are formed by the Word.⁴⁰ Thus as we proclaim and teach the Scriptures, this truth will penetrate the ears, hearts, worldviews and epistemological systems of our hearers. The Scriptures will challenge our hearers' behaviors, feelings, linguistics, worldviews, and epistemologies because God is actually present and exercising power in His Word in oral, written, and sacramental forms.⁴¹

⁴⁰ Francis Pieper in volume 1 of his, *Christian Dogmatics*, shares on page 197 that reason can be thought of in two ways, ministerial and magisterial. The magisterial use of reason happens when mankind's reason stands above the wisdom of God and judges God's Word on the basis of man's argument. The ministerial use of man's reason happens when man's reason is formed and shaped by God's wisdom, the Word of God stands above mankind. Pieper shares more specifically saying, *"The ministerial use of reason is, of course, legitimate in theology because the Holy Ghost works and sustains faith only through the Word of God as it is correctly perceived by the human mind. Scripture therefore very emphatically enjoins this use of reason..."* Pieper goes on to say on page 199, *"We must distinguish between reason left to itself, or judging according to its natural principles, and reason held locked within the circle of the divine Word and kept under discipline, or illuminated by Holy Scripture. That the latter can judge in matters of faith, we do not deny; but we deny that judgment in matters of faith belongs to the former."* Contradictions do not rise when the scriptures form our reason and form our worldviews. However, contradictions do arise according to Pieper when, *"Reason has gone mad, presumes to judge things that transcend its sphere."*

⁴¹ T.R. Halvorson (Personal Communication, July 27th of 2012) says, *"Many people say that it does little good to quote the Bible to people who do not already accept the epistemology of revelation. If our doctrine of the Word were merely Fundamentalist or Reformed, we could agree. But in Lutheran theology, the Word is not merely authoritative and inerrant. The Word is living and active. The Word not only is something. The Word does something. It persuades those*

The church as the body of Christ continually comes to worship to be ever reformed by the Word. If the church merely gathers together for social or fellowship reasons and the Word does not ever form and reform the body of Christ, the church is no different than a common rotary club. In a striking statement William Willimon once stated, “Community, ’ untested by any criterion other than our need to huddle in groups, can be demonic.”⁴² Therefore, according to Willimon we should not be surprised when, “modern congregations may express surprise and even offense at hearing the ancient biblical story.”⁴³ Willimon goes on to share in his book *Shaped by the Bible*, that it is not the job of a pastor to apologize for the scriptures but to simply be faithful proclaimers of the Word. Appealing to Jesus he states, “The story caused offense when it was first preached in places like Nazareth; we should not be surprised that it continues to offend. In fact, we preachers ought to be troubled when our handling of the Bible never offends!”⁴⁴

Our calling as pastors and Christian educators is not to lessen the worldview conflict nor alleviate the epistemological crisis, as many in our day and age do for the sake of positive pragmatic results. Rather, our calling is to be faithful expositors of the

whom the Holy Spirit converts even though the converted never held either explicitly or implicitly to the epistemology of revelation before, because the Holy Spirit and the Word have the power to effect either or both implicit or explicit epistemological change in the hearer, causing them to, seemingly simultaneously, convert to the Word and to Christ, to the revelation and the Person, and that happens because of the Word being like a sacrament (or the sacraments being like the Word) does something.”

⁴² William Willimon, *Shaped By The Bible* (Abingdon Press, 1991), 85.

⁴³ Willimon, *Shaped by the Bible*, 63.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

Word⁴⁵ and to graciously stand by the side of the congregation and students as they experience small and large worldview conflicts as well as small and large epistemological crises. Furthermore, the pastor and Christian educator is not to introduce any *new* knowledge to the congregation. They are simply called to be a vessel to proclaim what the church already have accepted to be true even though at times they may have forgotten it. As a pastor and Christian educator, you have the privilege of proclaiming and teaching the unchanging truth and wisdom of the Word, and you get to stand faithfully by your parishioners and students in the midst of their epistemological crises with compassion.

⁴⁵ E.g., 2 Timothy 4:1-5

Appendix A: A Biblical Epistemology and Worldview Exercise

The material at the bottom of the page comes from a document that I have worked on for the past several years. The document is titled, “*How Do We View Christianity? Two Ways: Plan A and Plan B.*” The material covers 24 different doctrinal subjects with two opposing worldviews laid forth (*i.e. Plan A and Plan B*). Each subject also has epistemological sources listed (*i.e. Bible References*).

By comparing Plan A with Plan B, this sheet may create a worldview conflict for you, the reader, as you ponder which plan is right and which one is wrong. After the worldview conflict occurs, you will likely be driven to the Biblical sources listed above the worldviews where you will rightly examine the Scriptures. By turning to the Scriptures you are then entering into the realm of a possible epistemological crisis as the knowledge from the Scriptures may conflict with prior accepted knowledge.

Enjoy this little exercise as it illustrates and brings about a possible worldview conflict and a possible epistemological crisis. Lord willing it will bring about an epistemological transition and resolution for you too.

How Do We View Christianity? Two Ways: Plan A and Plan B

State of Mankind’s Heart and Sinful Actions (Jeremiah 17:9 & Mark 7:23):

Plan A: My heart is good; therefore, the evil actions that I do make me a sinner.

Plan B: My heart is evil; therefore, the evil actions that I do are because I am a sinner.

State of Mankind and Jesus’ Actions (Ephesians 2:1-10 & Ezekiel 37:1-14):

Plan A: I am infected with sin; therefore I ascend to Jesus so that I can get a hold of forgiveness and be healed.

Plan B: I am dead in sin; therefore Jesus descends to me so that I can receive forgiveness and be made alive.

Cause of Salvation (Romans 8:29-30; 2 Thessalonians 2:13-15; 2 Timothy 1:9 & Ephesians 1:3-6):

Plan A: God saves me in view of my faith; therefore, I am saved on account of my faith.

Plan B: God saves me in view of His mercy & the work of Christ; therefore, I am saved insofar as I receive by faith.

The Gospel Proclamation (Acts 8:35; Romans 10:13-17 & 1 Peter 1:12):

Plan A: Gospel proclamation is an announcement of good advice to be applied.

Plan B: Gospel proclamation is an announcement of good news to be believed.

Faith and the Word of God (Romans 10:17; 1 Peter 1:23-25 & Hebrews 4:12):

Plan A: As I hear the Word of Christ, the Word enables me to have faith. (i.e. Informative words that I act upon.)

Plan B: As I hear the Word of Christ, the Word creates faith in me. (i.e. Performative words that act upon me.)

Justification and Righteousness (Romans 4:1-12):

Plan A: Justification is my internal transformation, where I am made completely righteous.

Plan B: Justification is God's external declaration, where I am accounted completely righteous for Christ's sake.

Location Of Justification And Assurance (John 3:14-15, 19:30; Hebrews 12:2):

Plan A: Justification is something that happens inside a person, thus we look inward to one's heart for assurance.

Plan B: Justification is something that happened outside a person, thus we look outward to Jesus/Cross for assurance.

The Sacraments (Matthew 26:27-28 & 1 Peter 3:20b-21):

Plan A: Communion and Baptism are acts of my obedience and commitment brought to God, on my behalf.

Plan B: Communion and Baptism are acts of God's forgiveness and grace brought to me, on Christ's behalf.

Faith and Obedience (Romans 1:5; 1 Thessalonians 1:3 & Galatians 5:6):

Plan A: Obedience produces Faith.

Plan B: Obedience is a fruit of Faith. OR Obedience that consists of Faith.

Acceptance and Obedience... a.k.a. Sanctification (1 John 4:19 & Matthew 22:37-40):

Plan A: I obey (i.e. love); therefore I am accepted (i.e. loved) by God.

Plan B: I obey (i.e. love); because I am accepted (i.e. loved) by God through Christ.

Complete Sanctification (Hebrews 10:10-25 & Ephesians 2:10):

Plan A: Complete sanctification is the goal of all good works.

Plan B: Complete sanctification is the source of all good works.

Progress In Sanctification (Colossians 3:5-17 & Galatians 5:22-25)

Plan A: Progress in sanctification is the movement of the Christian upon holiness.

Plan B: Progress in sanctification is the movement of the Holy One upon the Christian.

Good Works (Ephesians 2:8-10 & James 2:14-26):

Plan A: Good works are prescriptive for salvation.

Plan B: Good works are descriptive of salvation.

Ongoing Effects of Original Sin and Grace (Romans 7:24-25 & 1 Timothy 1:15):

Plan A: I was a sinner who was saved by Grace. (i.e. viewing original sin and forgiving grace in the past tense.)

Plan B: I am a sinner who is daily saved by Grace. (i.e. viewing original sin and forgiving grace in the present tense.)

Understanding Repentance And Sanctification (Galatians 3:10; Galatians 5:24 & Colossians 3:5-ff):

Plan A: My sinful nature needs to be reformed daily.

Plan B: My sinful nature needs to be crucified daily.

Ongoing Struggle Against the Sinful Nature (Romans 8:13; Philippians 3:12-14 & 1 John 1:8-10):

Plan A: There is spiritual depth and maturity in this life when the struggle against the sinful nature entirely ceases.

Plan B: There is spiritual death and deception in this life when the struggle against the sinful nature entirely ceases.

Spiritual Blessings (Ephesians 1:3-14 & Colossians 2:9-10):

Plan A: Jesus is the means to every spiritual blessing; He is a means to another end. (i.e. Jesus helps me attain joy.)

Plan B: Jesus is the source of every spiritual blessing; He is the end. (i.e. Jesus is my holiness and joy.)

Worship (Luke 2:20 & Isaiah 6:1-8):

Plan A: Man is the speaker; God is the audience in worship; God responds to man's sacrifice of worship with pleasure.

Plan B: God is the speaker; Man is the audience in worship; Man responds to God's sacrifice of Christ with pleasure.

Prayer Conversation (Revelation 3:20 & Psalm 51:15):

Plan A: Prayer begins by me knocking on God's heart with my words; God responds to me in a prayer conversation.

Plan B: Prayer begins by God knocking on my heart with His Word; I respond to God in a prayer conversation.

Tithing Motivation (Exodus 25:2 & 2 Corinthians 9:7):

Plan A: God has blessed me in innumerable ways in life, because I give to God.

Plan B: God has blessed me in innumerable ways in Christ, therefore I give to God.

Church Discipline (Matthew 18:15-17 & Galatians 6:1):

Plan A: Church discipline can be summarized as vengeance for a wrong.

Plan B: Church discipline can be summarized as redemption from a wrong.

The Great Commandment & The Great Commission (Matthew 22:36-40 & 28:16-20):

Plan A: The Great Commission is about serving our neighbor through loving works.

Plan B: The Great Commandment is about loving our neighbor through loving works.

Plan B: The Great Commission is about disciplining our neighbor through the Gospel.

Exegesis Example (Matthew 13:44):

Plan A: The kingdom is the treasure & I am the man; I was willing to give up everything to obtain the kingdom.

Plan B: I am the treasure, the field is the world & Christ is the man; Christ was willing to give up everything to obtain me.

Assumption Example (Romans 6:1-23 & Galatians 2:17):

Plan A: Assumes the will is free, therefore, the preoccupation is always how to keep freedom in check, how to bind.

Plan B: Assumes the will is bound, therefore, the preoccupation is always how to set out the Word that frees.

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