

The Consequences of Opposing Worldviews and Opposing Sources of Knowledge

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What happens when two individuals with two opposing worldviews (i.e., lenses) interact? Paul 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.¹

Otherwise stated, 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 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

¹ Paul Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, a division of Baker Publishing Group, 2008), 47.

challenged the way that they perceived Him, saying, “Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves.”² Jesus was exposing their faulted worldview in relationship to Him.

What results from these worldview collisions? When the worldviews of individuals are challenged by events, situations, and opposing worldviews 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.³

Is this all bad? In general, worldview conflicts do and should happen continually to Christians. Obviously, as parishioners interact with each other in the church, there will be numerous point-of-view collisions over the color of

² John 6:26 (ESV).

³ Hiebert, *Transforming Worldviews: An Anthropological Understanding of How People Change*, 85.

carpets, service times, and so forth. However, these are not necessarily the worldview conflicts that are needed in the church. You see, 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 story 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 unbiblical assumptions in the church, due to worldviews that have *not* been formed solely by the Bible. Unfortunately, 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.

When a person's worldview is confronted, one should not be surprised when a person's defenses are raised immediately. As shared by Hiebert, there will be deep emotional reactions when a person is 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 a person's particular point of view.⁴ Therefore, looking back to our example, one should not be surprised when the

⁴ Ibid, 59.

beliefs and core teachings of Biblical Christianity (i.e., Christocentric and Crucicentric Christianity) are resisted; minimized and rationalized away, or even reinterpreted to fit into the parishioner's own longstanding worldview. The tension must be resolved for the parishioner. These themes must reinforce and comfort the parishioner, affirming that the parishioner's current spiritual worldview is sufficient and accurate.

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 sources of truth and how they acquire truth, for indeed truth is beneath their long-held worldviews.

Keep in mind that a worldview is formed by sources of knowledge and how one acquires truth. Therefore, when the worldview is challenged, the next logical step is to investigate sources of knowledge from which the worldview flows. Commenting on how worldview conflicts cause us to go back and rethink our sources and understandings of truth, 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 must go back and rethink much that we have taken for granted. This is the task of all teaching that is Christian.⁶

Indeed, a person can muddle on through life without a consistent, harmonious, and united framework of truth due to justifications often subconsciously being enacted to neutralize the co-existence of conflicting sources of knowledge. Thus, taking time to think about conflicting sources of knowledge 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 truth.

As previously mentioned, if there is a conflict over worldviews and the powerful themes imbedded within those worldviews cannot defend against the conflict, the conflict will bleed back into the realm of truth, where knowledge and its source will be questioned. Most likely, what one will find behind opposing worldviews are opposing ways of acquiring truth and opposing sources of knowledge. The clash between the two sources of knowledge and the way one acquires truth creates a crisis of truth (i.e., an epistemological crisis). John Wright shares that a crisis of truth occurs when

⁶ William H. Willimon, *Pastor: The Theology and Practice of Ordained Ministry*, (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2002), 220.

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.⁷

From personal experience, I can attest that worldview conflicts are uncomfortable, however, a crisis of truth can be paralyzing. Wright states that the pain of a truth crisis, "while ultimately helpful, initially sends shock waves through individuals and congregations."⁸

Essentially what is at stake in a crisis of truth is the assessment and comparison of two or more different and competing sources of knowledge. Keep in mind the ramifications of truth or false truths expressed in various 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

⁷ John Wright, *Telling God's Story: Narrative Preaching for Christian Formation* (Intervarsity Press: IVP Academic, 2007), 41.

⁸ *Ibid*, 43.

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 framework of truth. This not only resulted in their worldviews being exposed as erroneous, but it also resulted in a crisis of truth where the people grumbled about Jesus and His teachings. Their grumbling eventually led to the defense of their false truths. They questioned and challenged 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?’”⁹

Back to the previous example of individuals in the church who have been drastically impacted by Americanized spirituality. When these parishioners are exposed to Biblical Christianity, they will experience a crisis of truth, as they logically should. In simple terms, the introduction of a Biblical Christianity will contend with other sources of knowledge and false truths gathered by these parishioners. This interaction results in individuals facing a crossroad. According to Alasdair MacIntyre, the “conflict tests the resources of each contending tradition.”¹⁰

⁹ John 6:42 (ESV).

¹⁰ Alasdair MacIntyre, “Epistemological Crises, Dramatic Narrative, and the Philosophy of Science,” in *Why Narrative? Readings in Narrative Theology*, ed. Stanley Haurwas and L. Gregory Jones

Because it is difficult for people to live within the ongoing tension of two competing truths (i.e., a truth crisis) for an extended amount of time, the crisis will have to be solved or neutralized. What can and often does happen is that individuals will compartmentalize their longstanding false truths in such a way to remove it from the conflict and protect it from being exposed. This defense is a way that allows an individual’s false current knowledge and tradition to be free from being challenged or found to be in conflict with the new knowledge and new truths.¹¹ Like the defense that happens with one’s worldview, this defense against the emerging of new truths accomplishes the same results by preventing the necessary crisis from happening.¹²

If people cannot successfully compartmentalize their longstanding truth assumptions in order to eliminate and/or hold the truth crisis at a distance, tragically they will do several things to defend their system of false truths and worldview. The first option is that they may disregard the invading truth and the

(Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans Publishing, 1989), 147.

¹¹ The motives behind an truth 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.

¹² Ibid.

second option is that they may try and completely eliminate the invading truth. By either ignoring or abolishing the invading truth, the individual is then able to return to their previous incorrect assumptions, so that their false system of truth and blurred worldview can be harmonized with them once again.

John 6 and Luke 4 capture the most serious of defenses, the rejection of Jesus Christ. John 6 is the less intense example of a defense of false truth that entails the disciples only leaving Jesus (i.e., disregarding and ignoring). 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 a defense where the individuals disregards Jesus and leaves Him, which then eliminates their crises of truth, worldview tensions, and cognitive dissonances. Luke 4 on the other hand, is a much more intense defense of false truth. 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 their town was built, so that they could throw him down the cliff.”¹³ In this second example of a defense of false truth, 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 crisis of truth, 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 by disregarding and eliminating, even though their solutions were not favorable from a Christian perspective.

In summary, the collisions of opposing worldviews and sources of truth lead to a great deal of discord and uncomfortableness for an individual. This discord is not easily tolerated and does not provide a place for one to rest spiritually, emotionally, and cognitively. Thus, the ramifications of the conflict must be resolved by either rationalizing the conflict away or by tragically enforcing violence towards the invading truth; it must be resolved with urgency.

¹³ Luke 4:28-29 (ESV)