

Care for Those Experiencing a Truth Transition

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In the article, *The Consequences of Opposing Worldviews and Opposing Sources of Knowledge*, I addressed what happens when two individuals, with two opposing worldviews (i.e., lenses), interact—a collision occurs. Indeed, a worldview collision occurs, which typically leads to a worldview defense. If the worldview defense is not successful, both parties will journey into the realm of truth and their sources of truth will collide, leading to a crisis of truth.

However, what happens after a worldview collision and after a crisis of truth? What happens if the person finds himself transitioning from their previous held sources of knowledge and previous lens into the realm of a new source of knowledge and a new lens? For example, what happens when the Christian message of Christ Crucified for the forgiveness of sins deconstructs and overrides an established Americanized spiritual framework? If a person finds this happening they are in the process of a truth transition (i.e., an epistemological transition).

Just what is going on though in this case of what some simply call a ‘conversion?’ Alasdair 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.”¹ In other words, the assertions of a new source of knowledge will make it impossible for the person to depend on their old knowledge source. As a result, the previous source of knowledge is rejected and the new source of knowledge is received. This new source of knowledge becomes authoritative, which results in a change to the individual’s worldview, behavior structure, values, and feelings. Like falling dominos, the transition of truth impacts all aspects of the person’s life.

After the transition of truth has occurred, resolution begins to take place. MacIntyre again comments on how this crisis of truth is resolved as they transition. 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.”² Otherwise stated, within this resolution stage, the individual then processes the old knowledge and its source in light of the new knowledge and his new worldview. More specifically, during the

¹ 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), 140-141.

² Ibid.

crisis of truth, the person did not experience a comprehensive equilibrium where there was rest and continuity between his source of knowledge, his worldview, his language, and his behavioral patterns. In this resolution stage he begins to experience symmetry (i.e., balance), which then allows him to reflect upon the path that lies behind and the errors that were 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 a new perspective, and excitement over seeing things from a fresh perspective.³

³ 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), 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?*" James White, "How to Avoid Cage-stage-it is," 13 September 2007, <http://www.aomin.org/aoblog/index.php?itemid=2269&catid=4> (3 July 2013).

Two Biblical examples of a transition of truth 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 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.⁴

Another example of a 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, a defense occurred among the Athenians when some people scoffed at him. The beginnings of a transition of truth occurred for others who said, "We will hear you again about this."⁵

While many conversations will unfortunately come to a close due to a defense of a person's mistaken worldview and false truths, there are other times where people will say, "We will hear you again about this." Indeed, there will be times where God through

⁴ See Philippians 2:6-16.

⁵ Acts 17:32 (ESV).

His word brings about a transition of truth and a shift in a person's view of reality. When this begins to happen, a pastor, Lutheran educator, laymen, and/or parent needs to be on high alert and to be aware of what is occurring. Indeed the individual may experience additional worldview collisions and more crises of truth, but they may experience these in the presence of the one confessing the new truth. Surely, as they experience the transition from a former source of knowledge to a new truth, they will need a great deal of compassion and loving patience as their perception of reality and truth will ebb and flow.

You see, every Christian has the great privilege of confessing, teaching, sharing, and proclaiming the Word of God. Some, like pastors, are called to do this publicly, whereas others, like mothers, do this at the bedside of their children, and others will confess over a simple fence. Regardless of the messenger and the context, the Cross of Christ is the source of our truth, not experience, and not the wisdom of the world. Indeed, we stand underneath the scriptures and are formed by the Word.⁶

⁶ 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*

Thus as we proclaim, confess, and teach the Scriptures to those in the market place and within the private sector, this truth will penetrate the ears, hearts, worldviews and knowledge systems of our hearers. The Scriptures will challenge our hearers' behaviors, feelings, linguistics, worldviews, and sources of truth because God is actually present and exercising power in His Word in oral, written, and sacramental forms.⁷

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."*

⁷ 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 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."*

Not only will these collisions, shifts, and transitions happen to people in the market place and the private sector, but it occurs in the church. The church as the body of Christ continually comes to the Divine Service 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.”⁸ Therefore, according to Willimon we should not be surprised when, “modern congregations may express surprise and even offense at hearing the ancient biblical story.”⁹ 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!”¹⁰

In summary, does this mean that we intentionally look for ways to cause lens

⁸ William Willimon, *Shaped By The Bible* (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 1991), 85.

⁹ Willimon, *Shaped by the Bible*, 63.

¹⁰ Ibid.

collisions and crises of truth in the market place, private sector, and church? Of course not! Our callings as pastors, Lutheran educators, parents, patriarchs, neighbors, workers, students, etc. is not to intentionally bring about conflict for conflict’s sake, nor to lessen the potential crisis of truth, as many in our day and age do. Rather, our calling is to be faithful expositors and confessors of the Word¹¹ and to graciously stand by those in our community, congregations, and households as they experience small and large worldview conflicts, as well as small and large crises of truth. Furthermore, the pastor, educator, parent, neighbor, worker, student, etc. is not to introduce any *new* knowledge to those around them. They are simply called to be a vessel to confess the same message that the saints of long ago confessed.

In conclusion, as baptized saints and beholders of God’s precious Word, we have the privilege of confessing, proclaiming, and teaching the unchanging truth and wisdom of the Word, and we get to stand faithfully, by grace, with our fellow parishioners, friends, family members, children, and students in the midst of their worldview collisions, truth crises, transitions, and resolutions with compassion and integrity.

¹¹ E.g., 2 Timothy 4:1-5