

# Schaeffer Lecture 13

## May 1, 2023

### 13A: CVT's critique, with the last word to Schaeffer

- Van Til: *The Apologetics of Francis A. Schaeffer*
- unpublished manuscript (we obtained it from a guy named “Sal” from Philly)
- compilation of several letters written over a period of several years, to Schaeffer and *about* Schaeffer
- CVT touches on a number of Schaeffer's works including:
  - *The Wheaton Lectures* (which were published as a pamphlet)
  - “The Practice of the Truth” (Berlin Congress 1966)
  - “Speaking the Historic Christian Position into the 20<sup>th</sup> Century”
  - *The God Who is There*
  - *Death in the City*
  - *Escape from Reason*
  - *Pollution and the Death of Man*
  - *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century*
  - *The Mark of the Christian*
  - *True Spirituality*
  - *He is There and He is Not Silent*
  - *Genesis in Space and Time*
  - *The New Super Spirituality*
- our present glimpse into CVT is that he is alternately eloquent and abstruse
- as an apologist, Schaeffer takes his notion of guilt, history, and God from an independent study of nature and man as a “joint enterprise” with the unbeliever
- “rational man” is allowed to judge whether Christianity is true
- both Schaeffer and Carnell are using “presupposition” to mean “hypothesis”
- the traditional method of apologetics “assumes that the Christian and the non-Christian agree on their interpretation of at least one major aspect of reality”—which becomes Schaeffer's “point of contact”
- Schaeffer can't let go of his view of human autonomy; “but Christ has not come to supplement the natural man's ideas of himself and the world”
- Schaeffer seems to see man's understanding as not going far enough (but right as far as it goes)
- Schaeffer fails to see that both ancient and modern thought is based on the assumption of human autonomy
- CVT argues that the “traditional method” (epitomized by Aquinas and Butler) makes compromises with the non-Christian view in three respects: (1) the assumption of human autonomy; (2) the assumption of pure contingency regarding facts; (3) the assumption of pure rationality regarding logic

- only converted man can see the space-time facts for what they are; Schaeffer doesn't do justice to Christ in regard to truth (John 3); Warfield referencing Calvin says we need new light and new powers of sight
- "Jesus told the Pharisees that they utterly misinterpreted every space-time fact confronting them, including his raising of Lazarus from the dead."
- they didn't believe the miracles (attributing his power to demons), and they didn't believe the scriptures, either
- on the unbeliever's view, he cannot identify a single space-time fact nor bring his facts into intelligible relation to one another
- "By reason of the autonomous authority of his own 'reason' the unregenerate [man] is asked to establish God's 'authority.'"
- by appealing to fallen man, Schaeffer never challenges autonomous man's authority
- for the natural man, facts are "just there"—not pre-interpreted by God ("pure contingency")
- likewise, the laws of logic are "just there"
- "By the methodology of traditional apologetics the God who is there is not presented as the presupposition of all intelligible human predication."
- we must show the unbeliever that apart from God he ends with moral and intellectual destruction; his facts and logic are unintelligible
- traditional apologetics assumes the unbeliever knows himself as well as facts and logic
- "the entire non-biblical view of truth and of the method of attaining truth is internally meaningless"
- the unbeliever has used his logic to decide what can or cannot exist in space and time
- Schaeffer seems to be using a traditional form of apologetics that relies on modern man admitting the possibility of absolutes
- Aquinas wanted the natural man (starting with himself) to proceed from the *possibility* of God to the *probability* of God revealing himself
- "On the non-Christian basis, possibility is the source of God."
- but on this basis, the Christian must allow that the unbeliever could be right
- man starting from himself only concludes that a god exists which is not the God who exists
- Paul argues that man knows God as creator; the believer then must impress upon the unbeliever that the wrath of God rests on him
- Schaeffer: apologetics begins with man and what he knows about himself
- CVT response: man can (and must) objectively test the claims of Christ; "the natural man has the competence to judge whether what Scripture teaches is true"
- Schaeffer is frustrating his own purpose by capitulating at the point of facts and logic
- the Universe and Two Chairs critique:
  - does not express the mutually-exclusive nature of the Christian and materialist worldviews
  - the materialist cannot properly interpret the half of the orange he's looking at; as well, he assumes there is nothing else there to see; "he says, in effect, that the God who is there cannot possibly be there"
- autonomous man started with Adam: (1) facts are just there; (2) man must interpret the facts apart from the Creator-creature distinction (without God as the reference point)
- fallen man, "whose very powers of logic are assumed or said to be chance-produced, makes a universal negative judgment to the effect that God cannot exist."

- CVT to Schaeffer: “Your picture of the Universe and two chairs should satisfy an adherent of the Butler-Arminian view very well.”
- “I have not found any place where Schaeffer offers the Christian position about God, about man and the world as the presupposition of the possibility of predication in any field.”
  - *predication*: a description of the relationship between subjects and objects (if you have a better definition, please let me know)
- “The beginnings of modern science . . . is steeped in a comprehensive view of reality . . . [that] is the diametrical opposite of that found in Scripture.”
- the mark of the Renaissance man is independence from God
- “For Schaeffer the Christian presupposition is like an hypothesis that . . . meets the need better than does the non-Christian hypothesis. And we . . . Christian and non-Christian together, are to judge whether the Christian or the non-Christian [hypothesis] meets the need better.”
- “The Christian presupposition must prove its case by showing that it fits reality as already interpreted without the help of the trinity or any other Christian teaching.”
- conclusion: “For all practical purposes this means that Schaeffer still employs the traditional method of apologetics” where the notion of freedom is (in some measure) “independent of the plan of God for man and the world”
- insider’s tip: you can expect one of the essay questions on the final exam to be related to CVT’s critiques of Schaeffer’s “Universe and Two Chairs” metaphor
- you will not be asked about CVT’s critique of Bacon or Whitehead (pp. 41-49)
- Schaeffer: “A Question of Apologetics”
  - written in 1981 as an Appendix to *The God Who is There*
  - part of the complete works published in 1982
  - represents his “last word” on apologetics (though he would go on to write *The Great Evangelical Disaster* shortly before his death in 1984)
  - for all intents and purposes, Schaeffer didn’t budge from his earlier views
  - “apologete” as a matter of definition: for Schaeffer it means being “out in the midst of the world” not living in a safe house
  - there is no automatic, formulaic application—every individual is different; there is no single approach that meets every need (hence my description of Schaeffer as an *improvisational* or *situational* apologist)
  - the dominant consideration in our conversations is love . . . we must meet the person where he is
  - Schaeffer’s approach depends upon answering the unbeliever’s questions in order to remove his obstacles to belief; that “we would take seriously what they are preoccupied with”
  - because everyone has basically the same questions, we have to be able to “shift gears in language” to adapt to their differences in terminology (here again we see Schaeffer’s *missionary* motive—learning the “native language” of those he’s trying to reach)

- “the Christian answers are truth . . . the Christian system . . . is a unity of thought . . . a whole system of truth”
- Schaeffer insists that all men are caught in the reality of what is—no matter what they claim to believe
- “God shuts everyone up to the fact of reality, and everyone has to deal with the reality that is.”
- hence it’s not difficult to see what “method” of apologetics Schaeffer is going to develop from his starting points—he’s going to challenge the unbeliever to consider how his ideas conflict with reality—and then show that the Bible contains the answers that fit
- the present generation is lost in the sense of having no final answers for anything
- the answer to the twentieth century and its lostness is “in the beginning God created the heavens and the earth”; afterward we can deal with the spiritual lostness of modern man
- those who reject the “good, adequate, and sufficient reasons” for the *truth* of Christianity are left with a leap of faith—a probability that is one among many; even Christianity is one probability among many
- faith is needed to become a Christian, but embracing Christianity is not a leap of faith into the dark (belief without sufficient reasons)
- why don’t more people believe? because Christianity is the easiest and hardest religion—easiest because all is accomplished by God, but hardest because it robs rebellious man of his autonomy
- “Unless one gives up one’s autonomy, one *cannot* accept the answers.”
- “At times some have said my way of discussing ‘apologetics’ is a form of rationalism. . . . Some who have said I am a rationalist also speak of my being Aristotelian.”
- rational thought (as in antithesis) is not from Aristotle, it is from reality; we must use antithesis in order to deny it (like using objective reason to reject objective truth)
- “No one stresses more than I that people have no final answers in regard to truth, morals, or epistemology without God’s revelation in the Bible.”
- Schaeffer emphasizes the necessity of the work of the Spirit along with “sufficient answers” that come from the Bible
- “I am not a professional, academic philosopher—that is not my calling, and I am glad that I have the calling I have, and am equally glad some other people have the other calling.”
- Schaeffer doesn’t claim to have all the correct philosophical answers, and defers to “the more academically oriented” to handle the details
- “Apologetics, as I see it, should not be separated in any way from evangelism.”
- Schaeffer questions the value of any study of “apologetics” that does not lead people to Christ
- philosophy also can be a topic of study but it must do more than offer Christianity as a probability
- “Our primary calling is to truth as it is rooted in God, His acts and revelation; and, if it is indeed truth, it touches all of reality and all of life, including an adequate basis for, and some practice of, the reality of community.”