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# Fifty Years on: The Legacy of Francis Schaeffer – An Apologetic for Post-moderns

Christopher Tinker and Melvin Tinker

It was in 1955 that one of the most significant evangelical apologetic movements was born: the L'Abri fellowship, founded by Dr. Francis Schaeffer and his wife Edith. What began almost 'accidentally' with a few young enquirers having their searching questions handled honestly and compassionately, was to become a force for the gospel which has influenced many thousands around the world up to, and including, the present day.

Given that Schaeffer was an active apologist from the 1950s to the early 1980s, his work was conducted in a largely modernist context. As such, his apologetic may seem to come down to us with a long elapsed 'sell by date' readily attached. Schaeffer has been criticised for having a far too rationalistic approach to apologetics and his histories of Western thought have been rendered as too simplistic.<sup>1</sup> What is more, Schaeffer was working with a concept of absolute truth in a climate dominated by rationalism, both of which are, at the very least, treated with suspicion if not downright disdain by post-moderns. Whilst recognising the limitations of Schaeffer's work (and of course the same is true of all apologists—C. S. Lewis, G. K. Chesterton to name but two), we maintain that Schaeffer's approach to apologetics still provides a valuable resource for the way in which Christians might engage with the post-modern mind. Not only do Schaeffer's ideas provide a framework for understanding the post-modern world, but various aspects of his approach prove eminently suited to the present post-modern scene.

## Apologetic Suspicion

At the outset it has to be recognised that in some evangelical circles the term 'apologetics' has become a rather dirty word, possibly because of its rationalistic association—as if by knock-down arguments we can 'prove' Christianity to be true, falling back on an appeal to natural theology and the like. The cry goes out, therefore, that all we have to do is 'teach the Bible' and 'The Word will do the work'. But this would be a rather skewed understanding

of what constitutes apologetics as well as what is involved in effective Word ministry. Here is David Clark—

apologetics...should not be understood as an attempt to develop a perfect system of assertion and argument that will prove faith once and for all. Rather, it is a strategy for presenting, in the course of a unique discussion with a particular audience, the sort of case that makes sense to those persons. In other words, apologetics is the reasoned defence of the Christian faith in the context of personal dialogue.<sup>2</sup>

This captures perfectly the heart of Schaeffer's approach.

### The Upper and Lower Storey

The first area in which Francis Schaeffer's thought is relevant to post-modernism is his analysis of trends in modern thought which provides the backdrop to the post-modern reaction. These ideas are highlighted particularly in *Escape from Reason* and *The God Who is There*. The division in the way modern man viewed the world is presented as follows—

The non-rational and non-logical  
The rational and logical.<sup>3</sup>

In the modern age all that could be known was to be discovered rationalistically. Man starting from himself and working outwards whether through Cartesian doubt or the logical positivist 'verification principle'. Schaeffer states that, 'Modern man has given up all hope of finding a unified answer to the question of nature and grace',<sup>4</sup> that is, the relation between the spiritual/moral and the physical/scientific dimensions to life. Thus he describes the situation in the way depicted above. But according to Schaeffer, this formulation of modern man is hardly satisfying as it leads to despair. The upper storey—the domain of faith—is irrational, it cannot be communicated as it is empty of propositional content. 'Rationality and faith are totally out of contact with each other.'<sup>5</sup> This is where modern man was left, in a state of despair. He could understand nature as a closed system rationalistically, but meaning, in terms of purpose and significance, were unattainable and continued to elude him. The only way in which meaning could be found was to look to the upper storey where all rationality must be abandoned. Here one had to leap the gap in order to find any meaning. This

would be well illustrated by the existentialist ‘leap of faith’. One is reminded of Kierkegaard’s definition of truth as ‘Objective uncertainty held fast by the personal appropriation of the most passionate inwardness’.

If that is where modern man was left, clutching onto rationality but unable to find any meaning without making a gigantic leap of faith, it is precisely the point where post-modernism takes over. The chasm between the upper and lower storey is the legacy with which post-modernism has to wrestle. Post-modernism, as suggested by very term, defines itself as having rejected and moved on from modernism. Post-modernism is in many ways the bastard child of modernism. The claim of the modern age was that reason was the answer to all things; that given the right premises and right methods true knowledge was attainable. Doubt was to be extended to anything that could not be verified or falsified. The post-modernist takes this a stage further and asks; why should ‘reason’ be given immunity from doubt? The result is either solipsism or epistemological anarchism. Post-modernism, then, is the fallout of the despair that Schaeffer pointed to in his analysis of Western thought.

Interestingly enough, back in 1968 when commenting upon the iconoclasm of Michel Foucault, Schaeffer refers to a review of Foucault’s work by Stephen Marcus in which the term ‘post-modernism’ was used, probably one of its earliest usages in the context of what Schaeffer would describe as an ‘anti-philosophy’.

What Foucault is finally against, however, is the authority of reason....This is partly why he turns at the end to the mad and half-mad artists and thinkers of the modern age....Through their utterances the world is arraigned; mediated by their madness, the language of art dramatises the culpability of the world and forces it to recognise itself and reorder its consciousness. One cannot, in good conscience deny the force and truth of these observations; they catch the reality of the intellectual situation of the present moment—a moment that is coming to think of itself as post-everything, post-modern, post-history, post-sociology, post-psychology....We are in the position of having rejected the nineteenth and twentieth century systems of thought, and having outworn them without having transcended them with new truth or discovered anything of comparable magnitude to take their place.<sup>6</sup>

Accordingly, this ‘post-modern’ situation is rendered diagrammatically by Schaeffer as follows:

The non-rational — The Real Freedom is madness  
The Rational — Man is Dead

More recently, Kevin Vanhoozer has shown the implications of this movement of thought in terms of hermeneutics.<sup>7</sup> Echoing Nietzsche’s ‘death of God’, Roland Barth declares the death of the author. Putting it crudely, it is not that there is a meaning in a text to be discovered, but a meaning to be created—the reader is the author. Vanhoozer argues that, ‘The two deaths are related, insofar as they are both variations on the theme of anti-realism’. This is the essence of what Schaeffer captures in diagrammatic form. The death of God eventually leads to the death of man in terms of significance which means, in the realm of literature, the death of the author.

### **Pre-suppositional Apologetics—the Logic of One’s Conclusions**

Schaeffer’s apologetic technique was to lovingly push people to the limits of their presuppositions in order that they may see the inconsistency with the hope that they would then be open to listening to the good news of Christianity as a viable alternative worldview. The post-modern generation, it would seem, have performed that exercise themselves and have seen the intellectual bankruptcy of modernism. But where has this generation moved to? How has the upper and lower storey changed? It would appear that the post-modern person has retreated to the upper storey. No meaning to life could be found in or by rationalism, the lower storey is defunct. It may provide answers in science (and even here the epistemological basis for science could well be in crisis), but for philosophy and life it gives no answers, only despair.

Schaeffer was convinced that both the upper and lower storeys existed and were interrelated. Schaeffer was concerned to stress the equal importance of grace and nature. He argued that according to Scripture, Christ is Lord of all and that nothing and nobody is autonomous. He argued that the dualism in Renaissance thought (and indeed the dualism seen in the modernist’s predicament), was wrong and that the dualism was to be overcome in the Reformer’s view of God and his relationship to man and the world. The Reformation solution was that ‘God made the whole man and is interested in

the whole man, and the result is a unity'.<sup>8</sup> The biblical view does not allow for an absolute dichotomy between nature and grace, God is as concerned with the soul and meaning as he is with the body and science.

God's revelation in Scripture is of prime importance to Schaeffer, for if man is fallen then reason will always be flawed. There is a noetic dimension to the fall. Man cannot reach the upper storey by his own strength, as modernism proved. The only way in which we can understand the connection between nature and grace, and therefore live consistently, is if God reveals the truth to us. The task for Christian apologists is to convince people of the inconsistency of their own understanding and show the possibility of a connection between the upper and lower storeys. The way the apologetic proceeds is to push the non-Christian further and further towards the logic of his own conclusions which would mean becoming further detached from reality. A crisis would then be precipitated at which point one would invite the enquirer to consider the Christian alternative; or one could move in the opposite direction, so the more a person came into line with reality, the further they moved from their presuppositions, to the point where the tension became so great they would be forced to abandon them. The Christian worldview is one in which presuppositions and reality cohere.

Schaeffer's approach in leading people to a realisation of the despair in their position and providing a way in which the upper and lower storeys can be united consistently and meaningfully still has much to offer in the post-modern context. What is needed is an acknowledgement by Christian apologists of the shift in the content of the storeys and the position of the post-modern people with regard to those storeys. Once the change has been acknowledged, one can begin to build bridges in order to share the Christian worldview which provides answers to the most basic of human needs, unity between nature and grace, life and meaning, the upper and lower storey.

### **Modernism and Post-modernism—a Curse on Both Houses**

A Christian is neither a modernist nor a post-modernist, he is a biblicist. As such he will combine his belief in metaphysical objectivity with his belief in epistemological subjectivity. Metaphysically there is objective reality independent of the knower sustained by the all-knowing, all-powerful creator God. That is why science is possible. But there is also the recognition of

epistemologically subjective factors such as our culture, background beliefs and, of course, our sinful dispositions which will to a larger or lesser extent colour what we ‘see’. Post enlightenment modernism’s error was to suppose that by using the right method we could have access to the ‘truth out there’ in a way that was available to everyone. The error of post-modernism is to collapse the objective into the subjective so there is, in effect, no ‘truth out there’, only the ‘truth we create’.

However, the fact is that no one is a thorough-going modernist or post-modernist. Atheists like Aldous Huxley, Bertrand Russell, even Freud, were patently agenda-driven and were not so open to hard evidence as they would sometimes claim. Occasionally the façade is seen through as when Huxley writes—

For myself, no doubt, as for many of my contemporaries, the philosophy of meaninglessness was essentially liberation from a certain political and economic system and liberation from a certain system of morality. We objected to the morality because it interfered with our *sexual freedom*.

In other words, Huxley’s atheism did not arise out of an objective quest for ‘truth’ but was a convenient belief to cling on to in order to allow him to go down the path of sexual licence.

On the other hand, even the ardent post-modernist will use the wonders of the internet and word processors—all the products of hard-nosed science—in order to promote their ideas that words simply refer to words and not to any external reality, and that meaning is created by the reader, except in this case when the author means what he writes! Both positions are inherently unstable.

### Being Human

The second area of Schaeffer’s thought that may be helpful in apologetics with the post-modern person, is that of human significance. The need for significance and meaning seems to be the very reason that post-modernity has retreated to the upper-storey. Modernity provided no meaning for humanity, only despair, and post-modernity attempts to provide meaning in the irrational, as we saw with Foucault. If this assessment is correct, then Schaeffer’s approach to human significance is fundamental in approaching the post-modern person. Schaeffer’s analysis of modernism was that it caused the

‘death of man’, i. e., man is reduced to a machine. Due to the tendency towards determinism, flowing from rationalism, man ceased to have any meaning whatsoever, all decisions, actions and personality could be explained exclusively in terms of naturalistic causation. This leads to the idea that man is no longer responsible for his actions and man becomes part of the ‘cosmic machine’.<sup>9</sup> This was also seen by C. S. Lewis in his book *The Abolition of Man* with ontological reductionism producing what he termed ‘men without chests’.

Schaeffer was determined to challenge this conclusion of modernism with the biblical view of man. Man is responsible for his actions, which we can see especially in Romans 1 and Genesis 2, making him truly significant, influencing society and history in a profound way. Although Schaeffer is keen to stress the fall when considering rationalism, he makes it clear that this should not reduce man to nothing. The first description of man that the Bible gives is man, made in God’s image and, despite the fall, he is still significant and able to influence life and history.

Schaeffer saw the significance of man as he thought about the relationship between man and history and more importantly, between man and God. He was able to see that man was significant because God had created man in his image and for relationship with him. Man may be flawed and capable of horrific things, but man’s value remains after the fall, and Schaeffer was at pains to communicate this to his modern audience. The explanatory power of the doctrine of the *imago dei* is not to be underestimated.

Whilst this approach was significantly helpful in approaching modern man, the question is raised as to how it may help the post-modern? Determinism has been rejected by the post-modern person as failing to give significance and freedom. But significance in action is not the same issue now as it was at Schaeffer’s time. So how may the Christian apologist proceed?

### **An Apologetic for Post-moderns**

First of all, it would appear that if post-modernism is a rejection of modernism, it is important to acknowledge the failings of modernism as Schaeffer did. However, it must also be pointed out that in waking up to the excessive claims of modernism with its delusion of being ‘value free’ and ‘wholly objective’, some have gone to the other extreme in throwing out the objective baby with



the subjective bathwater.

Second, the doctrine of creation of man is vital. It is because man is made in God's image, as Schaeffer constantly emphasised, that explained his longing for significance, and this is basic to the human condition, including the post-modern condition. The literary critic, George Steiner, simply says, 'More than *homo sapiens*, we are *homo quarens*, the animal that asks and asks.' This idea authenticates the post-modern person's feeling for the need for meaning; it validates their rejection of the falsehoods of modernism whilst showing that we need not retreat to the irrational and again ultimately meaningless existence in the upper level. The post-modern person is affirmed as an authentic individual who has both meaning and significance in a world that modernism had reduced to mere cause and effect. But this is not achieved by retreating into the illogical 'upper storey', but by allowing the true upper level to reveal the truth about humanity and the significance of each individual life in relationship and action.

What Schaeffer was advocating, and most effective in using, was the need for critical engagement with the world in terms of analysing and critiquing worldviews and presenting the biblical worldview in the market place of ideas.

The universal relevance of this approach is illustrated by the experience of the famous economist E. F. Schumacher of *Small is Beautiful* fame. Several years ago he gave a talk in London which began with an account of his recent trip to St. Petersburg, Russia, which then was under communist wraps as Leningrad. Despite having a map in hand which he followed painstakingly, he realised that he was lost. What he saw on the paper didn't fit with what he saw right in front of his eyes, several huge Russian Orthodox churches. They weren't on the map and yet he was certain he knew which street he was on. 'Ah,' said an Inter tourist guide trying to be helpful, 'That's simple. We don't show churches on our maps.' Schumacher then went on—

It then occurred to me that this is not the first time I had been given a map which failed to show things I could see right in front of my eyes. All through school and university I had been given maps of life and knowledge on which there was hardly a trace of many of the things that I most cared about and that seemed to me to be of the greatest possible importance to the conduct of my life.

In other words, what he had been taught at school and college and picked up from the media missed out issues of faith which were so vital to him. Schaeffer contended that we all have these mental maps with which we operate, some are thought out, and others are simply picked up without much reflection at all. What these maps are meant to do is to help us understand how the world works and how we fit into it.

This raises the crucial question: how does anyone know that the way they are thinking about life is one which corresponds best to the way things really are? The answer is that any worldview has to answer satisfactorily four big questions.

1. Where do I come from? (the question of origins)
2. Who am I? (the question of significance)
3. Why is the world in such a mess? (the question of evil)
4. Is there a future? (the question of purpose)

It is no good having a worldview or faith which misses out on any of these questions and ignores the hard bits of reality. Our map must have a good 'fit' with our experience of the world.

It was the American philosopher, W. V. O'Quine who defined beliefs as 'a complicated, interconnected web of ideas'. We can think of a person's belief like a spider's web. Some elements of their belief will lie close to the edge of the web, impacting more directly on day to day living. Others will lie more towards the interior of the web, being essential to holding the rest of the web together and may seem a little abstract, but together they are part of a global set of beliefs about what I consider reality to be. By way of illustration, for the Christian, the central parts of his web of beliefs would be made up of doctrinal beliefs such as the deity of Christ, the transcendence of God, etc., the outer aspects would be matters such as prayer, telling the truth, showing kindness, trusting our senses and reasoning up to a point because of the influence of sin.

How, then, does one decide between competing worldviews or belief systems? There are certain criteria which are essential to all beliefs which test, to a greater or lesser extent, whether a belief system makes sense both of itself and of life in general. These criteria are transsystemic—they cut *across* worldviews. The criteria are—

1. **Consistency**—the concern here is that the assertions which constitute a worldview don't contradict each other. This is a negative criterion. It is the

application of the principle of non-contradiction that something cannot be A and non-A at the same time.

2. **Coherence**—the belief system hangs together in such a way that the different elements support one another providing a coherent whole.

3. **Comprehensiveness**—the belief must ‘gobble up experience’ by covering reality and not leave out the rough edges of life. Here one might cite the inability of Christian Science to account for the problem of suffering by essentially denying its reality as a product of the ‘mortal mind’.

4. **Congruence**—the belief system must be congruent with reality, that is, there must be a good fit with reality, and so providing a conceptual map which accounts for, and to a certain degree explains, what we experience. In other words, it has explanatory power.

5. A worldview must effectively **compete** and refute other worldviews. The law of non-contradiction applies between worldviews and not just within them. This is vital when tackling the question of religious pluralism.

6. **Commitment**—people need to *follow* the map. It is one thing to argue for a belief system; it is another to live it out. By way of example we might think of the experience of W. H. Auden. For most of his early life he lived with the belief in the goodness of man and the absence of God. The religion he had encountered as a boy he described as ‘nothing but vague uplift, as flat as an old bottle of soda water’ cynically saying that ‘people only love God when no one else will love them’. But all of that was to change two months before the outbreak of the Second World War in 1939. He was visiting a cinema in Yorkville, a largely German speaking area of Manhattan in New York where he saw *Sieg im Poland*, a documentary of the Nazi conquest of Poland. When Poles appeared on the screen, members of the audience screamed, ‘Kill them! Kill them!’ Auden was horrified. He left that cinema with his beliefs torn to shreds. First the belief that man was naturally good for if that were the case then how could he explain what he had just witnessed? Second, that he had to have a reason for thinking that Hitler was evil, for if there is no God and so no objective basis for deciding what is right or wrong, then he could not say Hitler was bad, only different, and he could not bear to live with that. Something was wrong with the world and his own belief system was inadequate to explain it. He needed a reliable map.

The Christian claim is that the Bible as a whole provides such a map, and of course much, much, more, as it is the means whereby we are addressed by the Creator himself and so are encountered by him in Jesus Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. What is more, if this map is true, then all other maps will be faulty and inadequate, some more than others.

### **True Truth**

If Schaeffer were alive today, he would no doubt continue to argue that Evangelicals should not lose their nerve on the question of ‘true truth’. This is crucial if we are not to sell out to a form of relativist pluralism which sees ‘evangelical truth’ alongside a range of other ‘truths’. What we observe in Schaeffer’s work is a cumulative case argument which presents Christianity as a fully-orbed worldview.

Thus, using his apologetic one can show that even the post-modernist cannot ignore the basic laws of non-contradiction: ‘When a man says that thinking in terms of antithesis is wrong, what he is really doing is using the concept of antithesis to deny antithesis. That is the way God made us and there is no other way to think.’<sup>11</sup> Following this through one can demonstrate that the post-modernist worldview collapses in on itself. If everything is a social construct then so is post-modernism and it has no unconditional claim to my assent. It saws off the branch upon which it is sitting.

Ethics, too, was an important ‘way in’ for Schaeffer as his celebrated remark that it is the relativist ‘who has his feet planted firmly in mid-air’ shows. A point he often made is that the only basis for objective moral law is the existence of an objective moral law-giver. You cannot derive what ought to be done from what is the case. The Christian Scriptures introduces us to that law-giver.

The explanatory power of the Bible scores highly in being able to explain the nature of man. Schaeffer had no truck with those who would exalt man to the level of the angels on the one hand, and those who would see him as nothing but an animal on the other. Here he stood in the tradition of Pascal in understanding the human condition as that of ‘deposed royalty’.

In all his works, but especially his later writings, e.g., *Whatever Happened to the Human Race*, Chapter 5 which is entitled “Truth and History”, Schaeffer

placed great store in the fact that God has acted in ‘space-time history’ and that its claims can be tried and tested at that level.

A careful study will show these truth claims to be cogent and coherent. In principle, Christianity is falsifiable (1 Cor. 15:13ff). Given his incomparable claims and credentials, Jesus identity is best explained by the historic claim that he was God incarnate whereas other explanations prove inadequate (e.g., a sage or a delusional). Unbelievers are to be challenged to expose themselves to the Gospel narratives in particular. Here we encounter part of God’s meta-narrative, but also we see within it our own story as we can identify with many of the characters and conditions Jesus encounters and so can be addressed by that living Word today. Their world is our world and God came into it. Here we may have to deal with issues regarding the reliability of the scriptural record, but we are not to under-estimate the raw apologetic power of the Bible itself. More recently other writers have taken up this point which is integral to the way Schaeffer operated. Peter Bolt of Moore Theological College, Sydney, has argued quite persuasively that Mark’s Gospel can be used to great effect in this way—

The use of the Gospel of Mark *as gospel* appears appropriate in today’s world in terms of its medium (since it is narrative), its method (since it provides both a point of contact with and a critique of existentialist thinking, and fully rounded Christology), and its message (since it provides God’s actual answer to the problem of actual suffering).<sup>12</sup>

A similar point is made by a fellow Australian, Peter Leslie, who suggests a story focussed model for evangelism and writes—

when talking about Jesus, seek to apply Jesus’ story to the story of the person you are conversing with. The gospel is the story of Jesus. Hence, the ‘tracts’ which ought to be studied and learnt are the four Gospels. Learn from the Gospel writers. Tell people what Jesus said and did in a way that impact upon their lives and questions.<sup>13</sup>

Part of Schaeffer’s genius was his ability to critically engage with alternative worldviews. His handling of Scripture was such that this engagement took place when the biblical worldview was shown to clash with other worldviews on

offer. For Schaeffer this meant that *whatever* the passage one was dealing with, there were elements in that passage which questioned some elements of life in our society today. Also, there will be other elements which provide an explanation for what is happening in our society or in the life of a listener which will be by far the best explanation and so will commend its truthfulness (this is especially seen in his book *Ash Heap Lives*). Therefore, Schaeffer saw that part of the apologist's task was (a) negatively, to demonstrate the futility of other worldviews; and (b) positively to allow the Scriptures to speak with breathtaking clarity into our society both as offering a critique and showing that there is a better way—the Christian way. This would involve a demonstration that the Christian faith is intellectually satisfying—the biblical worldview is coherent, consistent, comprehensive and congruous, etc. in a way no other faith or philosophy is, and that it is practically satisfying too, it actually works. This doesn't mean that Christianity is true because it works, but rather it works because it is true and it all flows from a personal knowledge of God.

### The Ultimate Apologetic

This naturally leads on to the next point of contact between Schaeffer's apologetic and post-modernity, namely the latter's concern for authenticity in *action*. As the apologist Ravi Zacharias has remarked, 'Whereas thirty years ago the non-Christian was concerned with the integrity of the message, now there is a greater concern for the integrity of the messenger.' Schaeffer was concerned with both.

Schaeffer has often been criticised (in our view wrongly), for simply trying to produce convincing *arguments* in his apologetics. As already noted, the post-modern person is deeply suspicious of any claim to truth or an overriding meta-narrative. What has been argued above, although it goes some way in showing the difficulty of finding any true meaning apart from Christianity, may be discounted by many as being too cerebral and not 'authentic'. But Schaeffer's apologetic and concern for propositional truth was undergirded and surrounded by his concern for authentic Christian living. He says, 'Christian apologetics must be able to show intellectually that Christianity speaks of *true truth*; but it must also *exhibit* that it is not just a theory.'<sup>14</sup> In other words, Christians must practice what they preach. For Schaeffer this was primary in the modern era, but how much more fundamental is it in this post-modern era! Post-modern values say that actions speak louder than words, and

that truth is something to be experienced. For Schaeffer, living out the truth was not only important to defend the truth but vital in order to commend the truth to unbelievers who were asking genuine questions. Christian apologetics were not to be reduced to words, but embraced Christian living. Schaeffer's concern in his generation was that true living would show that Christianity was more than just a better dialectic. This principle transposed into the post-modern world may demonstrate to post-moderns that an argument may have some validity and be worth investigating. Christian living was intended to support and back up apologetics, but it may be proposed that in a suspicious post-modern world, Christian living might well be a necessary precursor to any argument. This is why the sixth criteria for deciding between competing worldviews is crucial—is it possible to give oneself over to a belief at the level of commitment?

Schaeffer was concerned that the lives of Christians showed God to be personal. In order to express the truth of Christ being the Lord of both storeys, Christians must show this truth in the way that they live. God's existence has to be exhibited in the lives of Christians. As he said, 'People are looking at us to see, when we say that we have the truth, whether it is possible for this truth not only to take men's souls to heaven but to give meaning to life in the present time, moment by moment.'<sup>15</sup> Prayer was a vitally important factor for Schaeffer's life, as was reading Scripture, both expressions of the intimacy and relational nature of the God who is there with believers.

Not only was authentic living important in showing that truth existed and that the two storeys could indeed be combined to provide meaning, Christian living was also to express the value of human beings. To Schaeffer, personality is fundamentally important to humanity—'Man should see a beauty among Christians in their practice of the centrality of personal relationships.'<sup>16</sup> Schaeffer longed for the non-Christian to see humans being treated as they should be, as other human beings made in God's image. It is the Christian's responsibility to treat others as God values them. Towards the end of his life this showed itself in his campaign on issues of abortion and euthanasia with his friend, Dr. Everet Koop.

This underscores another strand of the 'ultimate apologetic' of Schaeffer—that Christian living was to be understood communally and not just

individualistically. This means that others were to see the way that Christians as a community treat outsiders, as people made in the image of God and secondly, to see the way that Christians treated one another as a community commonly saved by Christ. Living matters, for, he writes, 'It is no use saying that you have a community or love for each other if it does not get down to the tough stuff of life.' It is therefore not surprising that Schaeffer's most effective evangelism took place within the context of the community of L'Abri.

Whilst this apologetic was important for a modern world, it has become fundamental for a church longing to reach others in a post-modern world. Schaeffer's concern for both propositional true truth, and active true living is perhaps best exhibited in the ethos for his initiative, L'Abri, summed up clearly in the Foreword to his wife's book of the same name.

The work of L'Abri has two inter-related aspects. First there is the attempt to give an honest answer to honest questions—intellectually and upon a careful exegetical base....The second aspect is the demonstration that the Personal-Infinite God is really there in our generation. When twentieth-century people come to L'Abri they are faced with these two aspects simultaneously, as the two sides of a single coin.<sup>17</sup>

The ultimate apologetic for Schaeffer, and undoubtedly the Christian apologist in the post-modern world, is the expression of truth in living.

### **A Prophet for Our Times**

Despite its critics, Schaeffer's work shows that it is still relevant today in a post-modern world. Schaeffer's ability to analyse, however briefly, general trends in western thought still has bearing upon post-modern apologetics. The honesty with which Schaeffer approached the failings of modernism will surely help Christian apologists today. With wisdom and adaptation to today's climate Schaeffer's approach to truth and thought is indeed a help in understanding and exposing the weaknesses of post-modernism. Meanwhile, Schaeffer's emphasis on the significance of man and the living out of truth within a Christian community of love, helps all Christians in analysing not only how to live the Christian life authentically and truly, but to commend the truth in this post-modern age to those around them.



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## ENDNOTES

1. For example, Alistair McGrath, *Passion for Truth* (IVP, 1995), p. 170.
2. David K. Clark, *Dialogical Apologetics* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1993), p. 99.
3. Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who is There*, (IVP, 1969), p. 60.
4. *Ibid.* p. 60.
5. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
6. Francis Schaeffer, *Escape from Reason*, p. 69-70.
7. Kevin Vanhoozer, *First Theology* (Leicester: IVP, Apollos, 2002), p. 238.
8. Schaeffer, *Escape from Reason* (IVP, 1995), p. 29.
9. Schaeffer, *Death in the City* (IVP, 1969), p. 69.
10. For the transsystemic nature of criteria, see David L. Wolfe, *Epistemology—The Justification of Belief* (IVP, 1982).
11. Schaeffer, *Escape from Reason*, p. 35.
12. "What is the Gospel for Today's Church?" *Explorations* 7 (Lancer): 27, and more recently in *The Cross at a Distance—Atonement in Mark's Gospel* (IVP, 2004).
13. "Sharing your Faith," *Salt* 3, 1989.
14. Schaeffer, *The God Who is There*, p. 148.
15. Schaeffer, *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century* (Hodder & Stoughton, 1975), p. 88.
16. Schaeffer, *The God Who is There*, p. 157.
17. Edith Schaeffer, *L'Abri* (Norfolk Press, 1969), p. 5.

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