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The Christian faith as a way of life: in appreciation of Francis Schaeffer (on the fiftieth anniversary of L'Abri Fellowship)

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KEY WORDS: Christ's lordship; creation, fall, and redemption; infinite-personal God; materialism, rationality, rationalism, realism; 'salvation is a unity'; way of life, world-view.

Introduction

Like countless other people in the fifty year history of L'Abri Fellowship (founded in 1955), I arrived at the doorstep of Chalet les Mélézes at L'Abri in Huémoz sur Ollon, Switzerland. Francis A. Schaeffer (1912-1984), along with his wife Edith (1918-), a prolific author in her own right, founded L'Abri Fellowship in Switzerland a half century ago. He, in particular, was a Christian intellectual, cultural critic, practical theologian, author, noted speaker, and evangelist, whose ministry in the last half of the twentieth century incited worldwide study and discipleship centers. It was at L'Abri some thirty-six years ago in the summer of 1970 that I first committed my life to Christ as Lord and Savior, 'the Way, the Truth, and the Life' (John 14:6). It was at L'Abri that I began to understand the Christian faith as a way of life rooted in the truth about reality, about the meaning of life, and communion with God. It was also at L'Abri that I began to understand that living under the Lordship of Jesus Christ entailed the sanctification of the whole of life, including the life of culture, particularly the intellectual life.

There have been many changes in my life since 1970 – not the least of which is returning to the Catholic Church in 1992 – but throughout them I have always regarded L'Abri Fellowship, especially Francis Schaeffer's vision of true Christian spirituality as a way of life, as a point of reference in my walk with the Lord Jesus Christ. Some evangelical Protestants may find this a surprising claim for an evangelical and orthodox Catholic like me to make.¹ Of course my appreciation is not uncritical – there exist philosophical and theological differences between us, but a reflection dedicated to him is not the place to raise them. Rather, in this personal tribute to Francis Schaeffer on the fiftieth anniversary of L'Abri Fel-

1 On this claim, see my 'Living Truth for a Post-Christian World: The Message of Francis Schaeffer and Karol Wojtyła,' *Religion & Liberty*, Vol. 12, No. 6, November/December 2002. Several paragraphs from this article are adapted in this reflection.

lowship, I believe that the most appropriate way to show my continuing appreciation for him is by expressing my personal understanding of his legacy. This legacy is, I think, Schaeffer's understanding of the Christian faith as a way of life and the first principles informing that understanding.

In what follows, then, I will first say a few words about five core principles that are, as I see it, at the root of Schaeffer's understanding of the Christian faith. Then I will go on to set out his vision of true Christian spirituality.

I. Schaeffer's five principles

1. *Realism about truth*

Schaeffer holds that Christians must affirm a realist notion of truth and its applicability to Christian beliefs. The Christian faith is true to reality.² In other words, Christian belief is true if and only if objective reality is the way the belief says it is; otherwise, the belief is false. These beliefs are either true or false, and objective reality is what makes them either true or false. Schaeffer cautions us that once the distinction between truth and falsehood is set aside, as it is in contemporary culture, one renounces the truth of the Christian faith.³

2. *Christian faith is rational*

Schaeffer holds that there are 'good, adequate and sufficient reasons' to affirm the truth of Christian beliefs, and hence 'to *know with our reason* that Christianity is true.'⁴ Thus, to say that Christianity is rational is to say both that it is not contrary to reason as well as that there are positive reasons for believing it to be true. Indeed, faith, so taken, involves believing some propositions to be true, because faith is a cognitive activity. 'True Christian faith rests on [objective] content. *The true basis for faith is not the faith itself but the work which Christ finished on the cross.*'⁵ Nevertheless, as Schaeffer rightly sees it, faith demands more than believing the truth of some propositions about objective reality. Hence, faith isn't merely a cognitive activity, because it also involves the 'whole man' ('his thoughts, his will, and his emotions are all involved as a unit')⁶ who trusts in, and is committed to, the promises of the God who is there.

2 Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1981), 19-20.

3 This is the major thesis of Francis A. Schaeffer's most influential book, *The God who is There*, 30th Anniversary Edition (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1998 [1968]).

4 Francis A. Schaeffer, 'The Question of Apologetics', Appendix A, in *The God who is There*, 202, and throughout 198-201.

5 Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God who is There*, 164.

6 Francis A. Schaeffer, *True Spirituality*, 30th Anniversary Edition (Wheaton, Illinois: Tyndale House Publishers, 2001 [1971]), 101; see also, 80: 'On man's side, it is

3. Rational faith, not rationalistic humanism

Although the Christian faith is *rational*, the Christian believer is not *rationalistic*. The key difference here is quite basic. It is one thing to say that the Christian faith measures up to the legitimate aspirations of reason. 'There are good, adequate and sufficient reasons to know that the Christian answers are truth'.⁷ It is an entirely different matter to say that man's reason is the measure of all things, including truth. '*Rational* means that the things which are about us are not contrary to reason; or, to put it another way, man's aspiration of reason is valid. And so the Judeo-Christian position is rational, but it is the very antithesis of rationalism'.⁸ *Rationalistic humanism*, as Schaeffer also calls it, makes human reason the *source* and *basis* of all our beliefs. 'A *rationalist* is someone who thinks man can begin with himself and his reason plus what he observes, without information from any other source, and come to final answers in regard to truth, ethics and reality'.⁹ We must reject rationalism, urges Schaeffer, because 'man cannot generate final answers from himself'.¹⁰ Rather, divine revelation, God's written Word revelation, is the ultimate cognitive source of what is known – propositional revelation – truths about God, man and the world.¹¹ Yet, divine revelation is not merely a communication of truths, but also God revealing Himself with the express purpose of establishing 'a living person-to-person communication' with man, a relationship in which man is to find his salvation, indeed, his meaning.¹²

4. Worldview thinking

Schaeffer stressed the importance of worldview thinking and thus the necessity of Christians thinking of the Christian faith as a total world-and-life view. 'Life-orienting beliefs'¹³ about God, man's meaning and destiny, reality, morality, and knowledge make up a worldview, giving overall direction and guidance to an individual's thoughts and actions. These beliefs are not necessarily held

redeemed man as a unity who now stands before the personal God. It is not just one part of man. The will, the mind, the emotions – all are involved: the complete man, as a unit, involved in this moment by moment, one moment at a time, believing God's promises about the significance of the work of Christ in our present lives'.

7 Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God who is There*, 201.

8 Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God who is There*, 30.

9 Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God who is There*, 204.

10 Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God who is There*, 205.

11 On the concept of propositional revelation, see his 'Is Propositional Revelation Nonsense?' Appendix I, in Francis A. Schaeffer, *He is There and He is not Silent* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972), 90-94.

12 Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God who is There*, 192.

13 I borrow this term from Del Kiernan-Lewis as short-hand for 'a category of beliefs that are especially important to anyone who takes the overall direction, shape, and value of their life seriously'. 'It is the kind of belief that systematically underlies a wide range of [one's] thoughts and actions' (*Learning to Philosophize* [Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2000], 61).

consciously, and hence they are described as presuppositions, meaning thereby that they tacitly function as the perspective from which an individual sees and interprets all of life. Significantly, both Christians and non-Christians think in terms of some life-orienting belief or other that is part of a total world-and-life-view. Indeed, there exists a conflict of worldviews in contemporary culture, especially between the Christian worldview and Secularism in all its varied forms. Thus, the Christian has a responsibility to work out the implications of this total-view by articulating, communicating, defending, and justifying it to a given generation.

5. *The Lordship of Jesus Christ*

Jesus Christ is Lord over all areas of life. "True spirituality cannot be abstracted from truth at one end, nor from the whole man and the whole culture at the other. If there is a true spirituality, it must encompass all."¹⁴ Christians should be engaged in the project of transforming the whole world, including culture, for Christ. Schaeffer breaks with any hint of dualism, or bifurcation, between faith and life in its totality.¹⁵ 'Christ is Lord of all – over every aspect of life'.¹⁶ Yes, even the intellectual life is in service of Christ the King. As Schaeffer puts it, 'It is no use saying He is the Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the Lord of all things, if He is not the Lord of my whole unified intellectual life'. 'I am false or confused', adds Schaeffer, 'if I sing about Christ's lordship and contrive to retain areas of my own life that are autonomous. This is true if it is my sexual life that is autonomous, but it is at least equally true if it is my intellectual life that is autonomous'.¹⁷

II. Christian faith as a way of life

Undoubtedly, the enduring legacy of L'Abri Fellowship is found in Schaeffer's vision of true Christian spirituality, that is, the Christian faith as a way of life. Among the few autobiographical remarks Schaeffer makes about his own spiritual journey the one regarding the spiritual crisis in his own life that took place in 1951 clearly stands out. The immediate cause of this crisis is the 'problem of

14 Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God who is There*, 177.

15 As Schaeffer states in his work, *Death in the City* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 2002 [1969]), 155, 'If you say that the universe has a spiritual dimension and yet do not live like it, you are acting as though you know less than the pagan'. Indeed, the source of 'dustiness, unreality, and abstraction' in the evangelical church, says Schaeffer, 'is that many are functioning as though they knew less about the universe than the pagan knows. They have moved over in unfaith and living as though the universe is naturalistic. No wonder there is a dustiness! In such a case the evangelical church is a museum of dead artifacts representing what once was living practice of the doctrine we still say we believe'.

16 Francis A. Schaeffer, *Escape from Reason* (London: InterVarsity Press, 1968), 83.

17 Francis A. Schaeffer, *Escape from Reason*, 83.

reality', as Schaeffer calls it.¹⁸ That is to say, around that time Schaeffer's growing awareness that something was wrong brought him to the point of realization that there is very little reality to the Christian faith of orthodox believers, namely, this faith is not bearing much fruit in their present lives and, in turn, in the total culture. He explains: 'I served for many years as a pastor, knowing all the while that there was a vacuum in my preaching. I could tell people how to accept Christ as Savior, we could talk about being in heaven after Jesus came back, but I had very little to tell them about the *present* aspect of salvation. If we don't know something of the reality of salvation in our present life, it doesn't mean that we are lost, but it means that the whole thing takes on an air of unreality.... We have got to get a grasp on how our faith relates to where we are right now'.¹⁹ Schaeffer also experienced this lack of reality in his own Christian life and so he felt the need 'to go back and rethink his whole position' as a Christian.²⁰ He adds: 'I searched through what the Bible" said concerning reality as a Christian. Gradually I saw that the problem [of reality] was that with all the teaching I had received after I was a Christian, I had heard little about what the Bible says about the *meaning of the finished work of Christ for our present lives*' (italics added).²¹ Most significant, true spirituality is not just about knowing that I am justified in Christ before God and that, on this basis, I am heavenward bound. This view would seem to leave our present life bereft of the possibility of living in 'newness of life... right now, between the new birth [in Christ] and our death, or the second coming of Jesus'.²² 'Even in justification', Schaeffer adds, 'many Christians who are perfectly orthodox in doctrine look back upon their justification as though it were the end of all, at least until death comes. It is not. Birth is essential to life, but the parent is not glad only for the birth of his child. He is thankful for the living child that grows up.... So it is with becoming a Christian'.²³

Thus, the Christian life is not just about God's forgiving our sins on the basis of Christ's finished work, but also his effecting within us, in the Spirit's power, and *in the present life*, an ongoing interior transformation that makes us alive in Christ, and in which Christ, who lives in me, brings 'forth fruit in the Christian, just as the sap of the vine brings forth the fruit in the branch', as a benefit of our communion with him.²⁴ 'Having accepted Christ as our Savior, we are united with Christ, not in a vague or unproductive sense; we are united with a resur-

18 Francis A. Schaeffer, *True Spirituality*, xxix.

19 Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Finished Work of Christ* (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1998), 124. For more on the 'problem of reality in our Christian lives', see Schaeffer's letters in the early years of L'Abri Fellowship: *Letters of Francis A. Schaeffer*, Edited with Introductions, Lane T. Dennis (Westchester, Illinois: Crossway Books, 1985), 63-64, 71-72, 75-82.

20 Francis A. Schaeffer, *True Spirituality*, xxix.

21 Francis A. Schaeffer, *True Spirituality*, xxx, and also, 75.

22 Francis A. Schaeffer, *True Spirituality*, 14.

23 Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God who is There*, 192.

24 Francis A. Schaeffer, *True Spirituality*, 49.

rected, living Christ, and as the bride of this living Christ we have the high and wonderful calling of bringing forth fruit to God. Christ is the vine, and we are the branches, abiding in Him, bringing forth fruit'.²⁵

Schaeffer's vision of true spirituality, of the life-affirming reality of the Christian's being united with Christ and sharing in his life and benefits, requires an understanding, however briefly in this context, of the following matters. Of course faith in Christ is at the heart of true spirituality, or the Christian way of life, but what is this faith and what exactly is its role within the Christian life? Furthermore, what is the Christian faith's distinctive vision of the truth about God, man, and the world?

1. What does it mean to have faith in Christ?

Schaeffer rightly holds faith to be a certain kind of knowing that is (1) relational, (2) experiential, and (3) propositional or cognitive in nature. Regarding (3), faith, although more than believing, that is, more than being intellectually committed to the truth of some proposition, is not less than believing, because authentic Christian faith necessarily involves believing that certain propositions are true – such as those propositions contained in the Nicene Creed. In this sense, faith is about the objective content of truth (*fides quae creditur*) that is historic Christianity. Regarding (2), faith is a personal act, that is, the subjective act of trusting God (*fides qua creditur*), of committing my whole life to God in Christ by the power of the Holy Spirit. 'Doctrine is important, but it is not an end in itself. There is to be an experienced reality, moment by moment. And the glory of the experiential reality of the Christian, as opposed to the bare existential experience, or the religious experience of the East, is that we can do it with all the intellectual doors and windows open'.²⁶ Closely connected to this aspect of faith is (3), where faith is also something relational, a mystical union between Christ and the individual believer. Says Schaeffer, 'Christian mysticism is communion with Christ'.²⁷ And in this union with Christ I share in his life and benefits – such as the moral guilt of my sin is gone, my sins are forgiven, sin's power over my life is broken, sanctifying grace, hope, and eternal life – here and now, in the present life, Schaeffer tirelessly reiterates. Furthermore, in this mystical communion, 'I

25 Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Finished Work of Christ*, 176.

26 Francis A. Schaeffer, *True Spirituality*, 62.

27 Francis A. Schaeffer, *True Spirituality*, 49. Schaeffer elaborates on 'true Christian mysticism' being 'not the same as non-Christian mysticism'. '[F]or it is not based merely on contentless experience, but on historic, space-time reality-on propositional truth. One is not asked to deny the reason, the intellect, in true Christian mysticism. And there is to be no loss of personality, no loss of the individual man. In Eastern mysticism – for which the West is searching so madly now that it has lost the sense of history, of content, and the truth of biblical facts – there is always finally a loss of the personality.... Not so in Christian mysticism. Christian mysticism is communion with Christ. It is Christ bringing forth fruit through me, the Christian, with no loss of personality and without my being used as a stick or stone, either' (49).

am immediately in a *new and living relationship with each of the three persons of Trinity*, participating in the inner love-life of the whole Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. 'First', Schaeffer adds, 'God the Father becomes my father. Theologically, this is spoken of as adoption.... When I receive Christ, on the basis of his finished work I become a child of God.... Second, when I accept Christ as my Savior, I immediately come into a new relationship with God the Son. In theology, this is spoken of as our mystical union with Christ.... Finally, the Bible says we also enter into a new relationship with the third person of the Trinity, the Holy Spirit. When we are justified, we are also and immediately indwelt by the Holy Spirit'.²⁸ Thus, faith is about Trinitarian communion and, consequently, the ongoing *transformation* of my whole existence in communion with the whole Trinity.²⁹ Let us consider a little further what this means.

2. How then does the reality of faith function within the Christian life?

The brief answer to this question here must be that Christ's finished work of salvation – his life, passion, death, resurrection, and ascension – encompasses the life of faith in its unity: justification, sanctification, and glorification.³⁰ Justification deals with our true moral guilt, sanctification deals with the power of sin, and glorification deals with the substantial healing of human existence, here and now, a foretaste of the future complete redemption of the whole man, indeed the whole creation. Schaeffer elaborates: 'Salvation.... is not only justification'. Salvation *includes* justification, when we accept Jesus as our Savior and therefore become free of our guilt before God. But salvation also includes certain ongoing realities in our present life. Salvation actually takes place in three tenses. 'In the past tense', adds Schaeffer, 'it was salvation from the *guilt* of our sin, which happened when we accepted Jesus as our Savior. In the present tense, it is salvation from the *power* of sin, which is what the word "sanctification" basically means. The power of sin in its outward appearance and inward ideas is to be broken.

28 Francis A. Schaeffer, *True Spirituality*, 67-68.

29 Francis A. Schaeffer, *True Spirituality*, 62. In contrast to a 'dead orthodoxy', Schaeffer always stresses the dynamic and passionate, living existential relationship with the Father, in Christ, through the Holy Spirit: '[W]hen I accept Christ as my Savior, my guilt is gone, I am indwelt by the Holy Spirit, and I am in communication with the Father and the Son, as well as the Holy Spirit – the entire Trinity. Thus *now, in the present life* [italics added], if I am justified, I am in a personal relationship with each of the members of the Trinity. God the Father is my Father; I am in union with the Son; and I am indwelt by the Holy Spirit. *This is not just meant to be doctrinal* [italics added]; *it is what I have now*' (69).

30 Francis A. Schaeffer, *True Spirituality*, 66-67. See also, *The Finished Work of Christ*, 24-25: '[S]alvation involves more than justification. We are justified by faith, but we are also to live in the present by that same faith – not just concerning finances but in all areas of life.... After being justified by faith, we are to live by faith. It is the second aspect of salvation, our sanctification'.

Then, in the future tense, in our glorified state in heaven, it will be salvation from the very *presence* of sin.³¹

We can easily appreciate Schaeffer's excitement in discovering what was needed for properly understanding the meaning of Christ's saving work for our present lives is the biblical teaching that 'salvation is a unity.' Of course this is not just the conceptual unity of a doctrinal truth.³² It is, fundamentally, the indivisible unity of the objective realities of creation, fall and redemption through Jesus Christ in the communion of the Holy Spirit. That is, Schaeffer understands sin to be radical, influencing the whole of creation, the whole spectrum of life, including the life of culture, but the meaning of Jesus Christ's redemptive work is, accordingly, equally radical because the whole fallen creation is reconciled in and through that work and, hence, is opened to the re-creating, i.e., restoring and renewing power, of God's Spirit.

3. What is the Christian faith's distinctive vision of the truth about God, man, and the world?

First, God created the world good. Indeed, the creation, especially man who is its crown, actually manifests God's goodness. This manifestation of goodness is God's thesis, His affirmation, His *Yes* to the creation (Gen. 1:31).

Second, all creation is fallen through original sin. Human nature as a whole has lost its original harmony, and man is wounded at the very root of his being, estranged from God, from himself, and from his fellow humans. His humanity exhibits the marks of being sinful, prone to sin, with sin being a violation of God's will and purpose. This sinfulness denies God's thesis and has its beginnings in Gen. 3. God's response to man's sin is *Yes*, but also *No*. *Yes*, because God, full of love, mercy and grace, does not abandon the fallen creation. Indeed, Gen. 3:15 contains the first proclamation of the Messiah, the *proto-evangelium*. But also *No*, because God, judging man in the light of His perfect justice and holiness is the author of the antithesis, of the sign of contradiction between good and evil, between the seed of the woman and the seed of the serpent.

Third, the Redemption accomplished through Christ's finished work – His passion, death, resurrection, and ascension – abrogates the antithesis between sin and creation. God's original thesis is reasserted and reestablished, but also enriched, fulfilled, and perfected. This Redemption restores the very heart of human nature, causing the rebirth of the human self in Christ (Col. 2:13; 2 Cor. 5:17). This rebirth manifests itself in the integral redemption of the whole man in Christ through the fellowship of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit, and with one another in them, which has been given to us in grace (Rom. 5:5). Indeed, this redemption in Christ becomes a vision of cosmic redemption for the whole creation, including society and culture, God's grace in Christ restoring all life to its fullness in accordance with His will and purpose.

31 Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Finished Work of Christ*, 121.

32 Francis A. Schaeffer, *True Spirituality*, 93.

Against this background, Schaeffer rightly contends that: 'We must allow [Jesus Christ] to bear his fruit through us. [O]ur calling is... to exhibit God and his character, by his grace, in this generation... in the whole spectrum of life and in the whole culture.'³³ Now, man's fall into sin affects the whole of human life, namely, first and foremost, man's relationship to God, and from there, his relationship to himself, to other men, to nature, indeed to every aspect of human life. The finished work of Jesus Christ should bring 'substantial healing' to each of these areas of life: 'Man is first of all separated from God, then from himself, and finally from his fellow men and from nature. The blood of the Lord Jesus Christ will give an absolute and perfect restoration of all these things when Jesus comes. But in the present life there is to be a substantial healing.'³⁴

I cannot in this context do justice to the rich description and analysis Schaeffer gives of the separations in human existence brought about by sin. There are, however, a few of these about which I must say something.

For example, man is separated from God and hence from himself because of a guilty conscience. Through the Holy Spirit's indwelling in man, his heart is renewed and transformed so as to love and obey God, but man still struggles with the frailty and weakness of human nature, and hence sin reenters his life. Says Schaeffer, 'Now just as in the conscious area of sanctification as a whole, so here in restoration: everything rests upon the reality of the fact that the blood of Christ has meaning in *our present life*, and restoration takes place as we, in faith, act upon that fact in specific cases of sin.'³⁵ Thus, in Christ, who continues to call us to conversion, we are freed, in his mercy, from the true moral guilt of sin before a holy God.

Schaeffer contends that the whole of human nature is wounded by original sin and needs to be redeemed, made holy, sanctified. We have therefore another example of a separation that flows from man's revolt against God, namely, the knowing powers of human reason, which Schaeffer thinks, like Aquinas, suffers the wound of ignorance and is deprived of its direction toward truth. This fallen state leaves the proper ordering of our intellectual powers to the truth in a precarious, confused, and disordered state.³⁶ True spirituality therefore frees the mind of the human person from its vanity, which is a darkened understanding, leading the person to turn away from the truth about God, the world, and ourselves. St. Paul writes, 'Be renewed in the spirit of your mind. That you put on the new man, created to be like God in righteousness and holiness of truth' (Eph. 4:23-24). 'This is not just an emotional holiness but holiness in relationship to [objective] content', adds Schaeffer, 'holiness in relationship to thought and a set of things that can be stated as true, in contrast to that which is false. What is

33 Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God who is There*, 187, 193, respectively.

34 Francis A. Schaeffer, *True Spirituality*, 94.

35 Francis A. Schaeffer, *True Spirituality*, 91.

36 St. Thomas Aquinas, *Summa theologiae* I-II, q. 85, a. 3, c.; q. 109, a. 2; II-II, q. 167, a. 1, respectively.

being dealt with here is the problem of internal ignorance in the sense of rebellion, turning from those things that are truth'.³⁷ Schaeffer's gloss on these verses is consistent with his emphasis that 'The battle for man is centrally in the world of thought... [that is] either his believing God on the basis of the content of the gospel or his calling God a liar'.³⁸

III. The God who is there

This last point brings me to the conclusion of my reflections on Schaeffer's legacy. A consistent theme throughout Schaeffer's writings is the claim that 'biblical Christianity has an adequate and reasonable explanation for the source and meaning of human personality. Its source is sufficient – the personal God on the high order of Trinity'. 'Without such a source', adds Schaeffer, 'men are left with personality coming from the impersonal (plus time, plus chance)'.³⁹ In arguing this point, Schaeffer stood firmly against the claim that Christianity and reason were permanently opposed to each other, that is, that the truth claims of Christianity had been shown to be false or irrational by the progress of human reason. In this context, he especially criticized the claims of the naturalist – nature is all there is, there is no God, and man is just a part of nature – whose view of reality reflects a materialist understanding of man in which he is merely the chance product of matter in motion. In short, man lives in an *impersonal* universe, according to the materialist, and hence personality is not intrinsic to existence. But then how does one explain man's personality from the impersonal beginning, plus time, plus chance?

Schaeffer presents the materialist with the following disjunctive syllogism: 'Either there is a personal beginning to everything, or one has what the impersonal throws up by chance out of the time sequence'.⁴⁰ The question is whether reality, especially human beings, finds its origin in the impersonal, plus time, plus chance? If the world should turn out to be the chance product of matter-in-motion, doesn't that mean that 'those things that make him man – hope of purpose and significance, love, motions of morality and rationality, beauty and verbal communication – would be absurd, indeed, ultimately unfulfillable and thus meaningless', i.e., irrational?⁴¹ In other words, isn't materialism irrational? Schaeffer argues that it is, and he thinks this conclusion is logically inescapable. 'No one has presented an idea, let alone demonstrated it to be feasible, to explain how the impersonal beginning, plus time, plus chance, can give personality. We are distracted by a flourish of endless words, and lo, personality has appeared out of the hat!' Adds Schaeffer, 'As a result, either the thinker must say man is

37 Francis A. Schaeffer, *True Spirituality*, 97.

38 Francis A. Schaeffer, *True Spirituality*, 108.

39 Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God who is There*, 114.

40 Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God who is There*, 114.

41 Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God who is There*, 116.

dead, because personality is a mirage; or else he must hang his reason on a hook outside the door and cross the threshold into the leap of faith which is the new level of despair'.⁴² In sum, the materialist is left with an unhappy dilemma: either nihilism or fideism. Whichever he chooses, he must face the practical fear of the *impersonal* (the universe is ultimately silent), of *nonbeing* (of not knowing who I am and whether I have a valid, meaningful existence), and of *death* (with our hope being only in this life, it is doubtful whether life has any objective meaning or purpose at all).⁴³

In contrast, the Christian affirms the truth that there is a personal beginning to everything – the personal-infinite God who is there. As the former Joseph Ratzinger, now Pope Benedict XVI, recently wrote, 'The principle that represents the fundamental conviction of Christian faith and of its philosophy remains true: "In principio erat Verbum" – at the beginning of all things stands the creative power of reason. Now as then, Christian faith represents the choice in favor of the priority of reason and of rationality.... Even today, by reason of its choosing to assert the primacy of reason, Christianity remains "enlightened", and I think,' adds Benedict, 'that any enlightenment that cancels this choice [see disjunctive syllogism above] must, contrary to all appearances, mean, not an evolution, but an involution, a shrinking, of enlightenment.'⁴⁴

Schaeffer thought he had found the Achilles heal of materialism – Benedict XVI agrees, and so do I. He was persuaded that, not only did the serious Christian have nothing to fear intellectually from materialistic critics, but also that the Christian answer to the source and meaning of human personality 'should make us overwhelmingly excited'. 'But more than this', Schaeffer adds, 'we are returned to a personal relationship with the God who is there.'⁴⁵ Thus, he writes

42 Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God who is There*, 115.

43 Francis A. Schaeffer, *True Spirituality*, 123-124.

44 Joseph Ratzinger/Benedict XVI, *Truth and Tolerance: Christian Belief and World Religions*, Translated by Henry Taylor (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004), 181. In the new Preface to the revised 2000 edition of his classic work, *Introduction to Christianity* [San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2004 (1968)], Benedict XVI writes: 'Ever since the Prologue to the Gospel of John, the concept of *logos* has been at the very center of our Christian faith in God. *Logos* signifies reason, meaning, or even "word" – a meaning, therefore, that is Word, that is relationship, that is creative. The God who is *logos* guarantees the intelligibility of the world, the intelligibility of our existence, the aptitude of reason to know God [*die Gottgemässheit Gottes*], and the reasonableness of God [*die Vernunftgemässheit Gottes*], even though his understanding infinitely surpasses ours and to us may often appear to be darkness. The world comes from reason, and this reason is a Person, is Love – this is what our biblical faith tells us about God. Reason can speak about God; it must speak about God, or else it cuts itself short. Included in this is the concept of creation' (26). Most recently, see also Benedict XVI, *Christianity and the Crisis of Cultures*, Translated by Brian McNeil (San Francisco: Ignatius Press, 2006), 49.

45 Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God who is There*, 190.

in a paragraph that summarizes his most basic convictions: 'If we are unexcited Christians, we should go back and see what is wrong [with our thinking]. We are surrounded by a generation that can find 'no one home' in the universe. If anything marks our generation, it is this. In contrast to this, as a Christian I know who I am; and I know the personal God who is there. I speak, and he hears. I am not surrounded by mere mass, or only energy particles, but he is there (and he is not silent). And if I have accepted Christ as my Savior, then though it will not be perfect in this life, yet moment-by-moment, on the basis of the finished work of Christ, this person-to-person relationship with the God who is there can have reality to me'.⁴⁶

This is the fundamental truth of the Christian faith. I learned it from Francis Schaeffer thirty-five years ago, and that is his very precious legacy to me.

Abstract

Francis A. Schaeffer (1912-1984), a Christian intellectual, cultural critic, practical theologian, author, noted speaker, and evangelist, co-founded L'Abri Fellowship in Switzerland a half century ago. The article discusses Schaeffer's vision of the Christian faith as a way of life and the five core principles informing that vision – realism about Truth, the Christian faith is rational, against rationalistic humanism, Christian worldview thinking, and the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Schaeffer's own struggle early on with the heart of what it means to be Christian, particularly, the problem of existentially relating the Christian faith to our present life, showing how that faith can take root and bear fruit throughout the whole of life, is the background for discussing his vision that Jesus Christ's finished work of salvation encompasses the life of faith in its unity: justification, sanctification, and glorification.

46 Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God who is There*, 190.

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