

FRANCIS A. SCHAEFFER (1912-1984)

THE COMPLETE WORKS OF FRANCIS A. SCHAEFFER A CHRISTIAN WORLDVIEW (Crossway Books, 1982)

Volume One
Book One
Section V, Chapters One and Two

Commending the Christian Faith to Our Generation

Defense of the Faith

There are two purposes of Christian apologetics. The first is defense. The second is to communicate Christianity in a way that any given generation can understand.

Defense is proper and necessary because in every age historic Christianity will be under attack. Defense does not mean being on the defensive. One must not be embarrassed about the use of the word *defense*. The proponents of any position who are alive to their own generation must give a sufficient answer for it when questions are raised about it. Thus, the word defense is not used here in a negative sense, because in any conversation, in any communication which is really dialogue, answers must be given to objections raised.

Such answers are necessary in the first place for myself as a Christian if I am going to maintain my intellectual integrity, and if I am to keep united my personal, devotional and intellectual life. In the second place, these answers are necessary for the sake of those for whom I have a responsibility.

It is unreasonable to expect people of the next generation in any age to continue in the historic Christian position, unless they are

helped to see where arguments and connotations directed against Christianity and against them as Christians, by their generation, are fallacious. We must prepare Christian young people to face the monolithic twentieth-century culture by teaching them what the particular attack in our generation is, in contrast to the attacks of previous generations.

I find that everywhere I go—both in the United States and in other countries—children of Christians are being lost to historic Christianity. This is happening not only in small groups in small geographical areas, but everywhere. They are being lost because their parents are unable to understand their children, and therefore cannot really help them in their time of need. This lack of understanding is not only on the part of individual parents, but often also of churches, Christian colleges and Christian missions. Some Christian colleges (and I am not talking of “liberal” colleges) lose many of the best students before they graduate. We have left the next generation naked in the face of the twentieth-century thought by which they are surrounded.

So then, the defense, for myself and for those for whom I am responsible, must be a conscious defense. We cannot assume that because we are Christians in the full biblical sense, and indwelt by the Holy Spirit, automatically we shall be free from the influence of what surrounds us. The Holy Spirit can do what He will, but the Bible does not separate His work from knowledge; nor does the work of the Holy Spirit remove our responsibility as parents, pastors, evangelists, missionaries or teachers.

Communication of the Faith

Having said that, however, Christian apologetics should never be restricted to guarding against attack. We have a responsibility to communicate the gospel to our generation.

Christian apologetics is not like living in a castle with the draw-bridge up and occasionally tossing a stone over the walls. It is not to be based on a citadel mentality—sitting inside and saying, “You cannot reach me here.” If the Christian adopts this attitude, either in theory or in practice, his contacts with those who have accepted twentieth-century thought will stop. Apologetics should not be merely an academic subject, a new kind of scholasticism. It should be thought out and practiced in the rough and tumble of living contact with the present generation. Thus, the Christian should not be interested only in presenting a nicely balanced system on its

own, like some Greek metaphysical system, but rather in something which has constant contact with reality—the reality of the questions being asked by his own and the next generation.

No one can become a Christian unless he understands what Christianity is saying. Many pastors, missionaries and Christian teachers seem to be helpless as they try to speak to the educated people and the mass of people about them. They do not seem to face the fact that it is our task to speak to *our* generation; the past has gone, the future is not yet here. *So the positive side of apologetics is the communication of the gospel to the present generation in terms that they can understand.*

The purpose of “apologetics” is not just to win an argument or a discussion, but that the people with whom we are in contact may become Christians and then live under the Lordship of Christ in the whole spectrum of life.

It is important to remember, first of all, that we cannot separate true apologetics from the work of the Holy Spirit, nor from a living relationship in prayer to the Lord on the part of the Christian. We must understand that eventually the battle is not just against flesh and blood.

However, the biblical emphasis that knowledge is needed prior to salvation will influence us in attaining that knowledge which is needed to communicate the gospel. Historic Christianity has never separated itself from knowledge. It insists that all truth is one, and we must live and teach this even if twentieth-century thought and theology deny it.

The invitation to act comes only after an adequate base of knowledge has been given. This accords with the reason John gave for writing his Gospel: “Many other signs therefore did Jesus in the presence of his disciples which are not written in this book. But these are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God: and that believing ye may have life in his name.”¹ The word “sign” is related to the historic events of the life, death and resurrection of Christ as put forth in this Gospel. In twentieth-century language we could translate “sign” as “space-time proof”: “Many other space-time proofs therefore did Jesus.” Note first that these space-time proofs which, by their very nature, are observable were set forth as having taken place in the presence of the disciples who observed them. And not only that, but that they were written down in verbalized form. This means, of course, that these space-time proofs can be considered on the basis of the

normal use of language as set forth in grammars and lexicons.

The order in these verses is important. Firstly, these are space-time proofs in written form, and consequently capable of careful consideration. Then, secondly, these proofs are of such a nature as to give good and sufficient evidence that Christ is the Messiah as prophesied in the Old Testament, and also that He is the Son of God. So that, thirdly, we are not asked to believe until we have faced the question as to whether this is true on the basis of the space-time evidence.

The same kind of groundwork of true knowledge is set forth in the Prologue to the Gospel of Luke:² "Forasmuch as many have taken in hand to draw up a narrative concerning those matters which have been fulfilled among us" (there are things which have happened in history, in the space-time before "us"), "even as they delivered them unto us, which from the beginning were eyewitnesses" (this history is open to verification by eyewitnesses) "and ministers of the word, it seemed good to me also, having traced the course of all things accurately from the first, to write unto thee in order, most excellent Theophilus" (what is open to verification can also be communicated verbally, in writing) "that thou mightest know the truth concerning the things (or words) wherein thou wast instructed." There is no leap in the dark, for it is possible to "know the truth." Only when we have understood this introduction are we ready for the rest of the Gospel of Luke, beginning in the next verse: "There was in the days of Herod, King of Judaea, a certain priest. . . ." We know from the Prologue that Luke is dealing with a framework of historic truth, and we are to place Herod, Zacharias and Christ within this space-time framework.

Knowledge precedes faith. This is crucial in understanding the Bible. *To say (as a Christian should) that only that faith which believes God on the basis of knowledge is true faith, is to say something which causes an explosion in the twentieth-century world.*

The Importance of Truth

Some time ago I was speaking at Oxford University to a group of theological students on the subject of communicating the gospel to those people who are dominated by the consensus of twentieth-century thinking. When I had finished speaking, a Canadian post-graduate student stood up and said, "Sir, if we understand you correctly, you are saying that pre-evangelism must come before evangelism. If this is so, then we have been making a mistake at Oxford. The reason we have not been reaching many of these people is because we have not taken enough time with pre-evangelism." I said that I totally agreed.

Truth Stands Before Conversion

Before a man is ready to become a Christian, he must have a proper understanding of truth, whether he has fully analyzed his concept of truth or not. All people, whether they realize it or not, function in the framework of some concept of truth. Our concept of truth will radically affect our understanding of what it means to become a Christian. We are concerned, at this point, not with the *content* of truth so much as with the *concept* of what truth is.

Some who consider themselves real Christians have been infil-

trated by the twentieth-century thought-forms. In reference to conversion, in a Christian sense, truth must be first. The phrase "accepting Christ as Savior" can mean anything. We are not saying what we are trying to say, unless we make completely clear that we are talking about objective truth when we say Christianity is true and therefore that "accepting Christ as Savior" is not just some form of "upper-story leap."

Truth and Spirituality

Just as this matter of objective truth needs to be stressed before we can do effective evangelism, so the same thing must be considered before we can talk about true spirituality. From the biblical viewpoint, spirituality is not fragmented. Therefore, it has to be distinguished from modern concepts of spirituality, both in the West and the East, and, unhappily, from some evangelical concepts. It is not fragmented because it concerns the whole man in his whole moment-by-moment life. Over against this true biblical view, some evangelicalism has been Platonic in the sense that it has placed too much emphasis on the soul in contrast to the whole person, including the body and the intellect.

It is very important to realize, over against modern concepts of "spiritual experience," that the biblically based experience rests firmly on truth. It is not only an emotional experience, nor is it contentless.

We can think of true spirituality as having three parts. The indispensable beginning is to consider who (or what) "is there," and how I can have a relationship to him (or it). That something must be understood and defined. You cannot have a personal relationship with something unknown. Then, having understood who it is with whom I am to have a personal relationship and how I may have it, comes the actual step of entering into that relationship. The Bible calls this being converted, "born again," and this is a step which a person can take only as an individual. We cannot be born again in groups, but only one at a time. But to say that this is an individual matter is not the same as to say it is individualistic. The words may sound alike, but they are worlds apart. This gives the basis for a whole sociological and cultural concept.

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. The Bible insists that

truth is one—and it is almost the sole surviving system in our generation that does.

To avoid confusion, let us notice what this emphasis on the unity of truth does *not* involve. First of all, from the biblical viewpoint, truth is not ultimately related to orthodoxy. Orthodoxy is important, and I am known as a man who is a convinced orthodox theologian. But truth is not ultimately related to orthodoxy. Secondly, truth is not related ultimately to the Creeds either. I, also, believe the historic Christian Creeds are important, but we must realize that, while the Creeds are important, truth is not finally related to them. Truth is related to something back of both orthodoxy and the Creeds.

Thirdly, truth is not *ultimately* related even to the Scriptures. Let me explain. Though I firmly believe what the early church and the reformers taught concerning the nature of the Scriptures, and though I would emphasize that what they have to say concerning the Scriptures is crucially important, yet again, truth is finally related to something behind the Scriptures. The Scriptures are important, not because they are printed in a certain way nor bound in a certain kind of leather, nor because they have helped many people. This is not the basic reason for the Scriptures being overwhelmingly important. The Bible, the historic Creeds, and orthodoxy are important because God is there, and, finally, that is the only reason they have their importance.

The force of this was brought home to me several years ago when a young Swiss-German architect was reporting at one of our Farel House seminars in Switzerland on Max Planck's last essays. He pointed out that Planck, speaking in terms of his discipline, which was physics and not religion, said that modern man has had to move the screen back several times in our generation, and the question he posed was: what will be the final screen? Planck was saying that we do not know what the final screen will be in the material structure of the universe. This idea of a final screen started to bore away in my mind as a Christian, and as one speaking into the twentieth-century world. What is the final screen of truth?

The answer can only be the existence of God and who He is. Therefore, Christian truth is that which is in relationship to what exists and ultimately to the God who exists. And true spirituality consists of being in the correct relationship to the God who is there, first in the once-for-all act of justification, secondly by

being in that correct relationship as a continuing moment-by-moment reality. This is the biblical emphasis on true spirituality. It is a continuing moment-by-moment proper relationship with the God who exists.

The God Behind Truth

I have chosen to use this expression "God is there" as being equivalent to "God exists," not because I am unaware of the theological discussions today, nor because I have met anyone who, holding to the truth of the Bible, believes in a three-story universe, but in order to meet the problem of the modern theology, which denies that God is there in the historical biblical sense. We must have the courage to say that God is there, or, to use different terminology, that the final environment of what is there is God Himself, the One who has created everything else.

Let us notice carefully that in saying God is there, we are saying God exists, and not just talking about the *word* god, or the *idea* god. We are speaking of the proper relationship to the living God who exists. In order to understand the problems of our generation, we should be very alive to this distinction.

Semantics (linguistic analysis) for a certain period made up the heart of modern philosophical study in the Anglo-Saxon world. Though the Christian cannot accept this study as a philosophy, there is no reason why he should not be glad for the concept that words need to be defined before they can be used in communication. As Christians, we must understand that there is no word so meaningless as the word *god* until it is defined. No word has been used to teach absolutely opposite concepts as much as the word *god*. Consequently, let us not be confused. There is much "spirituality" about us today that relates itself to the *word* god or to the *idea* god; but this is not what we are talking about. Biblical truth and spirituality is not a relationship to the *word* god, or to the *idea* god. It is a relationship to the One who is there. This is an entirely different concept.

Following on from the discussion as to who or what God is, springs the second fundamental question of today, "Who or what am I?" In order to make it possible to have a meaningful relationship between God and man, an answer to both questions must be given.

The answer we give here profoundly affects our idea of the form of the relationship between God and man. Whether we re-

gard this relationship as mechanical, deterministic or—ininitely more wonderful—personal, will turn upon our answers to the questions “Who is the God who is there?” and “Who am I?”

Many sensitive people today are really struggling for their lives, asking the question, “What is the purpose of man?” In fact, modern man has not come up with a satisfactory answer to this question, in any of his fields of thinking. It does not matter much whether he has approached it along the lines of naked rationalism or the leap into the dark of modern secular and theological mysticism; twentieth-century man has failed to answer this question.

When someone asks me the Christian answer to this question of purpose, the reason for man’s existence, I always take them to the first commandment of Christ. In passing, let us note that there is no reason to think that the first commandment—“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind, and with all thy strength”¹—is merely a first commandment uttered by Jesus. We know it is not so because He quoted it from the last book of Moses, the book of Deuteronomy. But we can say something more. Surely it is the first commandment because it is the one that expresses the purpose of man and, individually, my purpose.

But it is not enough to quote this on its own. Without the answer given by historic Christianity that God is really there, such an answer can only be another cliché to the honest enquirer, just one more twentieth-century “religious answer”; and we cannot blame him if he stops listening. When I hear this first commandment to love the God who is there with everything that I am, it carries with it a total concept of life and of truth. A man can only love a God who exists and who is personal and about whom he has knowledge. So the fact that this God has communicated is also of supreme importance. But this commandment carries something more; it tells me something very fundamental and exciting about *myself*.

There is indeed something to be excited about if we know the dilemmas of our generation. If you could see the sober, sensitive men and women who come to our chalet asking the questions, “who, or what, am I?” with real longings, you would realize there is something electrifying to know about “myself.”

As far as the modern mentality is concerned, it is shattering to be told that there is nothing intrinsically nonsensical in calling upon me to love the God who is there, and that God is of such a

nature and that I am of such a nature as to make this a valid proposition. Those who understand what is involved will not dismiss this as "something I have heard since I was little." To think through the implications is totally exciting. The God who is there is of such a nature that He can be loved, and I am of such a nature that I can love; and thus this first commandment, or basic purpose of man, is the very opposite of a nonsense statement. I know what man is, and I know who I am.