

## Schaeffer Lecture 2

### February 6, 2023

#### 2A: 1912-1931

Schaeffer was born into an age of contrasts:

- technological advancement / global conflict
- competing ideas in society and church (emerging “culture wars”)
- the notion of “progress”—which means radical social change
- industrialization / urbanization
- growing acceptance of biological and social Darwinism (the new Pelagianism and the perfectibility of man)
- modernity *seemed* to be making God irrelevant

names we'll use:

- Fran or “Schaeffer” – The Man (IV)
- Frank – his father (III)
- Franz – his grandfather (II); wife Carolina
- Franky – his son (V)

parents: Frank (III) and Bessie Williamson (1880-1967)

- Bessie's grandfather William Joyce came from Nottingham in 1846
- Frank's father Franz came from Germany to America in 1869; died in a railroad accident when Frank was only 3 years old; Franz burned his family documents before starting his new life in America
- Frank had to take on adult responsibilities; at the age of ten he was working for a coal mine sorting rocks from coal on a conveyor; he had only a third grade education
- Frank was a navy veteran who served in the Spanish-American war (1898); he was mechanically inclined and used those skills at home and at work
- Bessie's father Wallace died when she was eight years old; she was one of four daughters
- Bessie: “I'm not going to be a slave to children”; when her father died, Bessie had to help raise her siblings; she grew up bitter and later could be harsh as a mother; she graduated from grammar school in 1897

Frank came from a Lutheran background; Bessie from Evangelical Free; neither were Christians until much later in life

January 30, 1912:

- Fran born at home late in the evening

- Germantown, PA near Philadelphia
- first house was on Pastoria Street
- doctor who delivered Fran was drunk at the time and forgot to file his birth certificate; the oversight wasn't discovered until 35 years later

Fran was the only child

- they lived in poor, working class conditions
- no books in the home—no intellectual or spiritual life

the routine of a hard life:

- Monday: washing
- Tuesday: ironing
- Wednesday: mending and sewing (homemade clothes)
- Thursday: market day
- Friday: house cleaning day

in childhood Fran used to play in the yard and watch for the vendor carts; the waffle cart was his favorite; in the evening he would watch the lamplighter make his way down the street

Fran began learning practical skills from a young age—carpentry, woodworking, drawing

for leisure the family would make an occasional trip to Atlantic City to swim and walk the beach and boardwalk; the trip required using trolley, ferry, and train

Fran's childhood chores included fetching a block of ice once a week using his wagon

grade school

- Fran's grade school was a mile from his house
- both grandmothers lived in the neighborhood; one was close enough to Fran's school that he took his lunch break with her each day
- he was often disciplined for misbehavior at school
- he was small for his age but scrappy
- later in life he was diagnosed with dyslexia—which made spelling difficult and helps explain many of his odd pronunciations
- he showed little interest in schoolwork since it didn't relate to his practical skills
- contracted scarlet fever and suffered hallucinations while quarantined at home by the health inspector

junior high school

- at 11 years old began junior high school at Roosevelt; here he was introduced to art

- joined the Boy Scouts which cultivated his interest in nature; Scouts came from England in 1910 and served as an outreach to children; the original motto was “Be Prepared for the Second Coming of Christ”
- Scouts met at First Presbyterian Church Germantown where he and his parents were soon attending church services
- won a speech contest for his troupe (kept the trophy for the rest of his life)
- joined the YMCA where he learned swimming and gymnastics
- Frank was disinterested in church and had a low view of pastors generally (they just *talk*, they don’t really *work*); he threatened to disown Fran if he ever became a pastor; Frank’s low view of pastors may have been in part from the lack of help his family received after father Franz died
- summer 1925 Scopes Trial; the defense lost the case in court but won by popular opinion; the effect was to make a mockery of fundamentalism

#### high school

- Germantown high school
- family relocated to a house on Ross St (fixer-upper)
- only found out later that he’d scored extremely high on an intelligence test and that his parents had considered enrolling him at Germantown Academy (private school)
- emphasis on vocational training, not college preparation: drawing, woodworking, electrical, metalworking (skills that were honed by helping around the house)
- described in his high school yearbook as *Friendly, Restless, Ambitious, Nonchalant*
- short stature with a wiry frame (5’ 6”); strong and athletic; activities included rifle club, basketball, roller skating
- heard a performance of the 1812 Overture that sparked his interest in music
- 1927 Lindbergh crossed the Atlantic
- 1928 demonstrations of color motion pictures and something called television; in those days, movies with sound were called “talkies”
- by high school, Fran becoming disillusioned; he had a searching mind that was not conditioned by social privilege
- his Saturday hikes took him through the city dump (short cut): “Even as a boy I realized I saw there almost everything people spend their money for.”
- at 17 he was working on a fish wagon; later he would work in a meat market, an icehouse, and a factory doing boiler maintenance
- attended church and Sunday school but doubted what he was hearing; his church emphasized good deeds (“social gospel”); church didn’t encourage Bible reading
- he became an ESL teacher to a Russian immigrant and was providentially introduced to philosophy; he felt at home with philosophy because it was a world of ideas
- began reading classics including Ovid (Roman poet); used to stay up reading late at night; more reading meant more questions; he wasn’t finding answers in philosophy, either
- realized he didn’t believe and wasn’t a Christian and wondered if he should discard the Bible; instead turned to the Bible and find answers
- early 1930 started reading Genesis

- Sam Wellman states: “The book of Genesis changed Fran’s life. . . . [it] spoke with thundering authority.”
- “Yes, that is what mankind is really like. At last I’m finding answers – real answers – to the meaning of life.”
- “God is intensely personal.”
- “What rang the bell for me was the answers in Genesis, and that with these you had answers – real answers – and without these there were no answers either in philosophy or the religion I had heard preached.”
- still, he wrestled with the historical accuracy of Gen 1-11 (about which he would later write a commentary); he deduced that Genesis must be true when it is quoted elsewhere in the Bible, especially by Jesus and Paul
- at this point he was forced to reject both philosophy and liberal religion
- within six months he was converted, but wondered if he was alone in believing the Bible
- his conversion produced a remarkable improvement in his school work; his writing demonstrated a new clarity of thought; he began writing poetry around this time
- meanwhile, his parents were expecting him to enroll at Drexel Institute after graduating in June 1930; his father intended for Fran to work for him after college
- his father presented Fran with a Model A Ford as a graduation present; he took driving lessons that summer and started spending time at the library and art museum
- summer work was hard to find—spent time painting houses besides helping with work on his parents’ house on Ross St
- that summer he became spiritually sullen because he’d found no other like-minded Christians
- Aug 19 1930 while strolling through Germantown one evening, he heard the sound of hymns coming from a tent meeting; walked into an Anthony Zeoli revival; this was his first time hearing the Bible preached verse by verse; answered the altar call but wasn’t sure whether he was there to get saved or to make a rededication
- from his Aug 19 journal entry: “I have decided to give my whole life to Christ unconditionally.”
- Aug 22 1930 returned to the meeting to hear more
- Aug 26 1930 went again and took friends with him
- by now, feeling called to ministry and losing interest in Drexel
- Sep 2 1930 registers for night school with intentions to work by day
- Sep 3 1930 declares “all truth is from the Bible”
- Sep 15 1930 began classes at Drexel; in short order he was hired by RCA Victor and then fired a few weeks later for helping incite a strike
- his new job (driving a grocery truck) was much closer to home
- sought counsel from his church and from the headmaster at Germantown Academy; Hampdon-Sydney was commended as preparation for seminary; meantime he was advised to take language classes at the local high school
- Dec 10 1930 writes “I shall give my life for God’s service.”
- December was the decisive moment – told his father that he was quitting Drexel in order to pursue the ministry; his parents were upset but started to soften within a few days

- Jan 30 1931 on his 19<sup>th</sup> birthday he began night classes at Central High School: Latin and German; achieved high marks in both
- by summer 1931 he was poised to enroll at Hampdon-Sydney but didn't know how he would pay the tuition (\$600/year)

## 2B: GWIT Sections 1-2

Packer intro: Schaeffer's "essential perceptions"

1. the wholeness of created reality; first principles; systems; exposure of presuppositions
2. the primacy of reason and the potency of ideas
3. western thinking adrift with relativism and irrationalism
4. finding the antithesis—"point of tension"
5. need to live according to the truth

§ 1 – the intellectual and cultural climate

chapter 1 – the gulf is fixed

- the changing concept of truth—subjectivity
- "methodology" is the manner we approach truth and knowing
- people are affected by the drift without knowing it
- "So this change in the concept of the way we come to knowledge and truth is the most crucial problem, as I understand it, facing Christianity today."
- Europe before 1890 and America before 1935
- "In America the crucial years of change were from 1913 to 1940, and during these relatively few years the whole way of thinking underwent a revolution."
- (1913 was the Armory Show in New York when modern art was brought to America)
- the essential *presupposition* of objective truth is what changed—both in the area of being and morality
- "Absolutes imply antithesis."
- "The floodwaters of secular thought and liberal theology overwhelmed the church because the leaders did not understand the importance of combating a false set of presuppositions."
- classical apologetics no longer effective
- "Historic Christianity stands on a basis of antithesis. Without it, historic Christianity is meaningless. The basic antithesis is that God objectively exists in contrast (in antithesis) to His not existing."
- the line of despair: above the line, "romantic" notions of absolutes; below the line, relativism; by "romantic" Schaeffer means without a biblical foundation—in which case we were already operating on some mystical basis
- how the shift progressed: philosophy → art → music → culture → theology
- three directions of the shift: geographically; vertically down through society; progressively through the disciplines

- “What the new theology is now saying has already been said previously in each of the other disciplines.”
- relativism as a new language—same words, totally different meaning; that change alone has huge implications for apologetics
- rationalism or humanism as the “unifying factor” below the line (man as the “integration point”)
- rationalistic philosophy failed; antithesis was abandoned along with truth
- “Today the world is small, and it is very possible to have a monolithic culture spreading rapidly and influencing great sections of mankind.”
- “True education means thinking by associating across the various disciplines, and not just being highly qualified in one field, as a technician might be.”
- anyone who has progressed through grad school can understand this statement: the results are unsettling if those with PhDs have the most narrow view of knowledge

## chapter 2 - philosophy

- Hegel (1770-1831)
- truth (antithesis) is related to cause-and-effect; “With the coming of Hegel this changed.”
- “By our era, Hegelian synthesis dominates on both sides of the Iron Curtain.”
- all possible positions are relativized; truth is sought in synthesis
- Kierkegaard (1813-1855) gave rise to Existentialism by removing reason from synthesis and making it a leap of faith—total separation of faith and reason
- by the late 19<sup>th</sup> century we see deliberate efforts to distance faith and reason (thereby separating “science” as a source of independent knowledge—e.g., John William Draper, *History of the Conflict Between Religion and Science*, 1874)
- no longer a uniform (unified) field of knowledge—dichotomy between the rational and non-rational
- “The philosophies of today can be called in all seriousness antiphilosophies.”
- three existential schools: Jaspers (1883-1869)—Swiss; Sartre (1905-1980) and Camus (1913-1960)—French; Heidegger (1889-1976)—German
- Jaspers: “final experience” (totally subjective)
- Sartre: “authentication” (just do something)
- Camus: suicide as the last important question
- Heidegger: angst (feeling of dread)
- logical positivism—never gets out of the gate
- defining philosophy—details without a system
- evolutionary humanism—no basis for expecting man to get better
- Aldous Huxley (1894-1963)—“first order experience” from drugs
- problem with all forms of existential experience: not open to communication; it is so subjective that it cannot be put into words; if you have to ask, you don’t get it
- irony? man is made to *experience* the world God created: “God has created a real, external world. It is not an extension of His essence. That real, external world exists. God has also created man as a real, personal being, and he possesses ‘mannishness’ from which he can never escape.”
- people can have a true experience of the world that God created

- hence we see indications of the kind of “apologetic” Schaeffer is going to use—appealing to the reality that we all have contact with—from which we get a knowledge of creation, man, and God

### chapter 3 - art

- Impressionists are the doorway into the line of despair
- Van Gogh (1853-1890) – wanted to create an artistic community; committed suicide in despair
- Gauguin (1846-1903) – went to Tahiti to paint “the noble savage”; failed to find the universal and tried to kill himself
- Cezanne (1839-1906) – tried to find the universal in geometric forms
- Picasso (1881-1973) – combined several forms including Gauguin and Cezanne and African masks into “Cubism”; his art abstracted from particulars to universals; the inevitable result was lost communication
- Mondrian (1872-1944) – followed Picasso and took his style to an extreme conclusion of horizontals and verticals; his pictures were not meant to be framed; the whole room might be redesigned around the painting – with the ironic result that there was no place for man
- Arp (1887-1966) – man tumbling into the endless abyss
- Duchamp (1887-1968) – “high priest of destruction”
- “Dada” as a chance concept to describe a school of art
- *the happenings* and *the environments* – immersive experiences of drama and art
- “These paintings, these poems, and these demonstrations which we have been talking about are the expression of men who are struggling with their appalling lostness. . . . These men are dying as they live; yet where is our compassion for them?”

### chapter 4 – music and culture

- Debussy (1862-1918) – the doorway to despair in music (an argument your teacher might dispute—e.g., Schoenberg (1874-1951) invented the twelve-tone scale that took down the conventional tonal structure of music)
- the 20<sup>th</sup> century is regarded as the transition from the “Romantic” era to the “Contemporary” era
- jazz as a particularly American form of music—highly improvisational (i.e., melodies and harmonies conforming to fewer constraints)
- Pierre Schaeffer (1910-1995) – *musique concrete* – “real music” – not synthetic, but real sounds highly distorted
- Henry Miller (1891-1980) – author – “Miller was an anti-law writer. He smashed everything to pieces to that there is nothing left. Even sex is smashed.”
- homosexuality as a philosophic expression?
- “In much of modern thinking, all antithesis and all order of God’s creation is to be fought against—including the male-female distinctions.”
- how does this observation extend to the present-day crisis of sexual identity and “transitioning”?

- John Osborne (1929-1980) – playwright – an idealist without an ideal: “a man who cares and yet has found nothing worth caring about”
- Dylan Thomas (1914-1953) – poet
- “These [artistic creations] are a strong message coming out of their own worldview.”
- film producers – Fellini, Antonioni, Bergman
- Bergman developed his body of work *in order* to teach existentialism; *The Silence* as an expression of nihilism: no meaning and no morals
- movies as a powerful conduit for the humanistic worldview – and much of it quite intentional
- Antonioni’s *Blow Up* in six words – “Murder without guilt; love without meaning.”
- influence of pop music – especially the Beatles
- 1960s as a key to understanding the 1980s – the results are still at work

#### chapter 5 – unifying factor

- “The watershed is the new way of talking about and arriving at truth, not the terms the individual disciplines use to express these ideas.”
- Senghor (1906-2001) – articulates the replacement of antithesis with synthesis; Marxism rests upon the dialectical methodology, but is no different from the religious form expressed by Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955)
- Christianity rests on truth; “it is prepared to face the consequences of being proved false . . . it leaves absolutely no room for a romantic answer.”
- “Already men are partway to the gospel, for they too believe that man is *dead*, dead in the sense of being meaningless. . . . We cannot take advantage of our opportunity *if we let go* in either thought or practice the methodology of antithesis.”
- we will come back later to the problem of *sentimentalism* in culture and church (to make a long story short, it cannot account for the reality of the world we live in, and as Christians, it makes us shallow and phony)

#### § 2 – the new theology

#### chapter 1 – theology

- wrong methodology as the unifying factor in the new theology
- “Since its concept of truth is wrong, what sounds right often means something entirely different from that which historic Christianity means by the same phrase.”
- Schaeffer elsewhere uses the expression “god words” to describe theological language stripped of its historic meaning
- old liberal theology rejected supernaturalism (miracles) – “Their search for the historical Jesus was doomed to failure.” (you cannot separate Christ from supernaturalism)
- theology followed philosophy for two reasons: they could not produce an historically credible Jesus and they were following the trend in philosophy; old liberalism collapsed on its own
- “Neo-orthodoxy gave no new answer” – it made the upper story leap of faith in order to find meaning
- N-O is “antitheology” – no unified field of knowledge



- 1913 as a critical date – Christians didn't understand the message
- Karl Barth (1886-1968) as the doorway in theology; followed by others like Reinhold Niebuhr (1892-1971) and Paul Tillich (1886-1965)
- the theologians have separated religious truth from both science and history; "Their new system is not open to verification; it must simply be believed."
- with this statement, we get an indication of Schaeffer's apologetic emphasis on the method of *verification*

## chapter 2 – modern mysticism

- nihilism as the simplest form of despair—everything is meaningless and chaotic
- second level of despair is the dichotomy between upper and lower story—there is no possible connection between them
- "The downstairs has no relationship to meaning; the upstairs no relationship to reason."
- there is consequently a total antithesis between reason and meaning
- irony that we still end up with antithesis—and here there is no possibility of synthesis
- by rejecting the antithesis, man has divided himself
- "In practice a man cannot totally reject the methodology of antithesis, however much his system leads him to it, unless he experiences the total alienation from himself brought about by some form of mental breakdown."
- here is where we're inclined to suggest "mass formation psychosis" to explain our present situation
- Sartre as an apostate for signing the Algerian Manifesto—he took a *moral* position on the war
- demonstrates that men cannot live with the conclusions of their system (true in all disciplines)
- which leads us to the third level of despair—mysticism (nothing there)
- the new theology uses religious connotation words that offer the illusion of communication
- "semantic mysticism"
- more than emotion—deliberately intended to convey meaning (should we call this "verbal sleight of hand"?)
- the new theology uses the concept of the symbol in order to produce obscurity—words like "god" have connotation without definition
- "The secret of the strength of neo-orthodoxy is that these religious symbols with a connotation of personality give an illusion of meaning, and as a consequence it appears to be more optimistic than secular existentialism."
- why the leap into the blind optimism of meaningless words?
- "The optimistic jump is a necessity because man is still created in the image of God, whatever he may say about himself, and as such he cannot go on living in meaninglessness."
- Leonardo da Vinci (1452-1519) – understood that man cannot start from himself and arrive at the universal
- "Leonardo died in despondency, for he would never let go of his hope of finding a unified field of knowledge. . . both mathematics and meaning. . . Men of his day. . . would never have accepted such an irrational solution [as the dichotomy]."
- the *new mysticism* does not expect to find a unified field of knowledge; the *old romanticism* never gave up the search

- “Probably the best way to describe this concept of modern theology is to say that it is faith in faith, rather than faith directed to an object which is actually there.”
- “In Christianity the value of faith depends upon the object toward which it is directed. . . . This makes Christian faith open to discussion and verification.”
- again Schaeffer hints at his intent to express Christianity in terms of *verifiable* content

### chapter 3 – art and language

- no one lives at ease in a state of despair
- “The fallenness of man does not lead to *machineness*, but to *fallen-manness*.”
- Bernard Berenson (1865-1959) – inconsistency between his personal morals and his taste for art
- Paul Klee (1879-1940) – art as a Ouija board the universe speaks through
- “In almost all forms of the new mysticism there is a growing acceptance of the ideas of pantheism. The West and East are coming together. . . .”
- sounds a lot like Peter Jones’ thesis in *The Other Worldview*
- Salvador Dali (1904-1989) – surrealist who joined Dada with Freud
- Heidegger’s shift – couldn’t live with existentialism; like Klee believed the universe would speak through art or language

### chapter 4 – music and literature

- Leonard Bernstein (1918-1990) – 3<sup>rd</sup> Symphony as an example of how an old form is absorbed into the new way of thinking – “we can know nothing of what is there, but can only listen to the musician, for he will make something of god for us”
- John Cage (1912-1992) – “the complete overthrow of the most basic assumptions of Western art since the Renaissance. . . . Cage proposed art born of chance and indeterminacy.” (*The New Yorker*)
- Cage attempted to devise a method of musical composition that would mimic the *I Ching* in removing the operator in order for the spirits to speak; but in Cage’s case, there is no one to speak (and we could add that the result is noise, not music)
- Cage illustrates how man divorced from God is always hoping that some order can come from randomness
- in regard of mushrooms, Cage seemed to think that differentiating species was a worthwhile endeavor – again illustrating that no man can live consistently with his humanistic view of the universe

### chapter 5 – the next phase

- two attempts to solve the problem of dichotomy: find unity on the upper level (reclaim history) or the lower level (God is dead)
- “God is dead” – i.e., he was never there
- “Christian atheists” who hold on to the word *Jesus*; exemplified by Paul Tillich; they are either atheists or pantheists

- Bishop Robinson – God is transcendental. . .and so is man (which makes the word meaningless)
- presumably referring to John A.T. Robinson (1919-1983) who published *Honest to God* in 1963; “he felt its chief contribution was its attempt to synthesize the work of theologians Paul Tillich and Dietrich Bonhoeffer. . . . Proponents of the traditional interpretation of Christianity, both Catholic and Protestant, reject Robinson's thesis as an unnecessary capitulation to Modernism.” (wikipedia)
- Karl Barth as the upper-story illustration: “trying to put a toe back into history”
- since they cannot go back to the old liberalism (which failed to find an historical Jesus) they can only make the assertion that Jesus was real
- “Society cannot function without form and motivation. As the old sociological forms have been swept away, new ones must be found or society breaks down altogether.”
- progressive Roman Catholics as dialectical thinkers (Chardin) – further from the Reformation than classical Romanism
- “The phrase Jesus Christ has become a contentless banner which can be carried in any direction for sociological purposes. . . . It can be used to trigger religiously motivated sociological actions directly contrary to the teaching of Christ.” (like abortion and gay marriage?)
- the new theology has the potential to produce an endless array of arbitrary absolutes