

## Reality and Pre-Evangelism in the Apologetics of C. S. Lewis and Francis Schaeffer

This talk presents a view of pre-evangelism as identified and practiced by C. S. Lewis and Francis A. Schaeffer in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. It was informed by their mutually held metaphysical realism, believing there was an objective right and wrong by which this world was ordered. In their pre-evangelism, Lewis and Schaeffer first showed the unbeliever (post Christian) that he was wrong before showing him why he was wrong. Schaeffer led the post Christian to follow his beliefs to their logical conclusion. Lewis did the same, but he also used imagination to awaken the objective notion of the true, the good, and the beautiful and showed that this sense of longing could not be explained by a naturalistic worldview. The goal of this talk is to show the importance of metaphysical realism in relation to pre-evangelism in our post-Christian world and how Christians might use pre-evangelism in their witnessing.

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- I. “For, in my view, today we are called to nothing less than the recognition of the fact that we need above all to understand the strategy the devil is using to neutralize the gospel. Unless we see this clearly, we understand nothing. Thus we ought to have a very exact knowledge of the full reality of the situation before we can hope to win any response. The gospel no longer penetrates. We seem to be confronted by a blank wall. Now if we want to go further, either we must find a door, or we must break down the wall. But first we must investigate this wall, in order to find out whether there is a door: thus we need to explore this world in which we are living. If there is not door (as seems to me to be the case) then we must find (or create) the instruments we need in order to make a breach in it.” (*The Presence of the Kingdom*, Jacques Ellul, 115)
- II. Our vision of reality determines how we view everything.
  - a. “Every time we plan or perform any activity in what we take to be a realistic manner, we do so by putting our confidence in a set of deeply held beliefs about the nature of reality.” (Paul Tyson, *Returning to Reality*, 1)
- III. A change in one's vision of reality means a change in how men think, which influences apologetics.
- IV. Schaeffer and Lewis challenged naturalism with metaphysical realism.

- a. A metaphysical realist: objects in our world exist independently of our thought and have natures that determine their existence.
- V. Lewis shows a commitment in his writings to Metaphysical realism.
- a. *The Chronicles of Narnia*
  - b. Also see *The Abolition of Man* and *Mere Christianity* and *Reflections on the Psalms*
- VI. According to Lewis, naturalism left us as post-Christian and not Pagans
- a. C. S. Lewis: Real pagans differed from Post-Christian:
    - i. He was religious (of course in an unhelpful way)
    - ii. He believed in objective right and wrong (law written on the heart) ["A Christmas Sermon for Pagans," (Strand, December 1946)]
    - iii. In this way, the pagan was a metaphysical realist, but got the metaphysical ordering wrong.
  - b. Post-Christian best describes today because it reflects the denial of metaphysical Realism.
- VII. Their view of reality shaped their apologetics
- a. We do not bend reality to fit us, reality bends us to fit it.
    - i. Therefore, start with reality—the way things are.
    - ii. Show that man does not live consistently in this reality with his naturalistic beliefs or his longings.
  - b. Christianity is about truth and reality – the truth of things, Reality.
  - c. From their understanding of reality came their apologetic approach, called pre-evangelism.
    - i. Beliefs about this world could be measured for truth value.
- VIII. For Lewis: Reality not only says something about the world, but also man.
- a. He points out that when we say a shoe fits, we are saying something about more than the shoe, we are saying something about feet.
- IX. For Schaeffer: “The truth of Christianity is that it is true to what is there.

- a. Pre-evangelism begins with reality, by which beliefs can be measured.
- X. Lewis’s pre-evangelism: “For my part I believe we ought to work not only at spreading the Gospel (that certainly) but also at a certain preparation for the Gospel. It is necessary to recall many to the law of nature before we talk about God. For Christ promises forgiveness of sin; but what is that to those who, since they do not know the law of nature, do not know they have sinned?” (Giovanni Calabria, vol 3. 365).
- a. This is how we show that a man is wrong
- XI. Schaeffer referred to Pre-Evangelism as no soft option
- a. His form of pre-evangelism is known as “Taking the roof off”
    - i. “Every man has built a roof over his head to shield himself at the point of tension. At the point of tension, the person is not in a place of consistency in his system and the roof built is a protection against the blows of the real world, both internal and external.”
    - ii. This shows that a man is wrong
  - b. The truth that we let in first is not a dogmatic statement of the truth of the Scriptures, but the truth of the external world and the truth of what man himself is. This is what shows him his need.
  - c. “Secondly, he [the unbeliever] needs to bow in the realm of morals—that is, to acknowledge that he has sinned and therefore that he has true guilt before God, the God who is there.”
- XII. In a sense, Pre-Evangelism brings despair (Schaeffer) and discomfort (Lewis)
- a. It is then the Gospel that brings the comfort—Pre-evangelism does not.
  - b. Schaeffer points out: “The truth of Christianity is that it is true to what is there.”
  - c. Lewis notes: “the universe rings true wherever you fairly test it.”
  - d. Lewis explained: “In other words, you must show that a man is wrong before you start explaining why he is wrong.”

- XIII. Pre-evangelism was grounded in metaphysical realism—objects in our world exist independently of our thought and have natures that determine their existence.
- a. Everybody must live in the same reality.
  - b. The purpose of removing the roof or bringing discomfort was to find/create a door through which to minister the Gospel—it was not to win an argument.
    - i. The purpose was to show that a person is wrong before telling him why he is wrong.
  - c. Their apologetic was not formed by the winds of culture, but of the truth of things because of their view of creation-reality.
  - d. It did not begin with some dogmatic statement from Scripture, but with the truth of what was.
  - e. This placed the beliefs of the non-Christian against the reality in which she lived, not against the Christian belief
    - i. Are the beliefs consistent with reality (the world and man)?
    - ii. If the person encounters discomfort or despair (that she is wrong)
    - iii. Then comes the Gospel that tells why She is wrong.
  - f. Now: there are good and sufficient reason to believe that Christianity is true.