Bridge-Building Conversations: Common Elements in Relational Peacemaking and Francis Schaeffer's Apologetic Ministry

by Ted Lewis, Duluth, 2020

"*I know exactly what you mean. I know exactly what you mean, exactly what you mean*."
-- Francis Schaeffer (in a personal conversation with Ted Lewis)

I once heard a speaker at a missions-week conference conclude his talk by saying, "Missionaries don't go around building walls; they go around building bridges."[1] As a mediator in the field of restorative justice, this verbal framing of 'walls and bridges' resonated well with me. A big part of my work is helping people overcome walls of mistrust so they can connect with each other in positive ways, typically through hard but healing conversations. A lot of it simply boils down to the way a *trust-building* process helps people to open up to each other. It makes sense to me that missionaries share the same framework.

Granted, not every Christian missionary is good at building cultural or relational bridgework with other people. While all missionaries have positive intentions to connect with others, some may inadvertently create higher walls by not paying attention to communication dynamics. In those cases, the missionary may be focusing more on themselves as a *giver of content* rather than focusing on the other person as a *receiver of content*. Not only that, the other person also has opportunity to bring forth their own content in the conversation. Is that content even welcomed? From all of this we can understand how walls can be built: if you do not respect others as equal human beings

[1] Paul Nethercott at Calvary (Baptist) Church, St. Paul, 2016.

and value the ideas they have to offer, it is likely they will not be receptive to the new ideas you have to offer.

All communication involves *sending* and *receiving*, and when a missionary sends out a gospel message without tuning into the way it is received, long-term damage can thwart the future seeding of the gospel for the person on the receiving end. But when a missionary truly cares about the other person, something opens up in the conversation. There is a bigger concern for *relational dynamics.* Ultimately, walls or bridges are determined by relational dynamics. This concern leads to a third communication element beyond *speaking* and *hearing*, namely the experience of *being heard*. When a person is truly heard by another, it forms a natural bridge between both of them. This heart-felt, human bond creates, for the person who has been heard well, an openness, a receptivity for hearing new things that can stimulate change.

Relational bridge-building can happen in a variety of conversational settings between people. In my own work as a facilitator for Victim Offender Conferencing, I have witnessed many conversations in which victimized and offending persons of the same crime have entered into a verbal 'gift exchange' and ended up with a deep sense of connection. I have also experienced it with parties in dispute, that is, people who were stuck in positions framed by clashing narratives. Once they came to appreciate each other's deepest interests, and showed some humility for their own contribution to the tensions, things relaxed and both sides felt a human connection. This allowed them to move from the captivity of the past to the promise of a new future. In short, I have seen many times when *shift happens*.

A similar bridge-building dynamic happens in the setting of apologetic ministries which prize a conversational style. When Christian apologists convey a genuine interest in the other person and value the building up of a relationship, these heart-zone dimensions can have a significant bearing on both the dialogue itself and what follows after the encounter. Two sets of ideas may in fact rub against each other, creating a potential storm-system of highly charged emotion. But the effort to establish common ground tends to diffuse this emotional energy, grounding out the voltage which would otherwise lead to greater protectiveness or defensiveness. This is not to say there is no discomfort in the dialogue. Rubbing is bound to happen. It is to say, rather, that amidst

the discomfort there is a stronger connection between both people who share a common idea or experience. The irony is that this deeper 'comfort' stemming from a human bond allows the discomfort of clashing content to be fruitful, to be transformed into something new.

Francis Schaeffer is an all-time hero of mine in this area of bridge-building conversations. His style of connecting authentically with his conversation partners is legendary. This article explores his style of apologetic ministry through dialogue, and also explores how his commitment to Christian unity and reconciliation involves a similar framework for peacemaking dialogue. For Schaeffer, there is a strong connection here: his unique conversational style of apologetics emerged out of his own concerns over *how* Christians address their differences and disagreements with each other. My hope is that the common elements of conversational ministry and relational peacemaking will inform and inspire new ways for anyone to facilitate (*facile* in French means 'to make easy') a bridge-building conversation with others.

Anecdotes abound with respect to the conversations Francis Schaeffer had with others that led to profound thought-shifts for the other person. He had a special way of bonding with that person on a level that created trust and openness. Dorothy Woodson, one of L'Abri's first workers, explained it this way:

> When Mr. Schaeffer would talk to you, there was nothing else in the world that was going on. He was totally focused on you and what you were talking about and was very involved, very interested. It wouldn't matter who the person was….I'd never seen that degree of concentration and having that kind of attention with anybody else.[2]

On this basis, Schaeffer was then able to help that person consider new ways of thinking or living. But what exactly was his secret for establishing such a bond, and thus inviting new trust and openness? What was it that led his conversation partners to

[2] Duriez, *Francis Schaeffer: An Authentic Life*, 145.

accept greater levels of vulnerability which helped them have unexpected ‘ah-ha’ moments that were transformative?

The Listening Missionary

Since Schaeffer’s death in 1984, most people know of him in two main ways. First, he was the quintessential *Christian apologist* to intellectuals, notably to those who engaged the upheavals of thought and culture in the 1960s. Secondly, he was a *Christian prophet* in a secular society that was losing its Christian foundations and, for example, was legalizing abortion. This is associated with his work in the last decade of his life, which later captured the attention of the Christian homeschooling movement. Of course, neither of these identities can be isolated from the joint-ministry he had with his wife Edith Schaeffer. Together they pioneered the work of L’Abri in Switzerland, and together they presented to groups worldwide.

Most people who spent time with Schaeffer, however, will name a third identifying area regarding his contribution to the 20th century. Schaeffer was a *Christian listener* who conveyed love and compassion to those with whom he had conversation. Even when he fielded questions after a lecture, participants who came up to a microphone to ask a question would comment later on Schaeffer’s capacity to tune into them as an individual and make them feel heard and respected. While Schaeffer’s identity as both Christian apologist and Christian prophet serve to highlight him as a champion for Christian truth, his identity as a Christian listener reveals more of how he, through Christian love, put that truth into practice.

Behind all of these identities, both biographically and chronologically, was Schaeffer’s identity as a *Christian missionary*. After receiving theological training in the 30s and being a Presbyterian minister in the 40s, the Schaeffers went to Europe in 1948 to evangelize children and young adults under the support of a new Presbyterian mission society. That ethos of support back in the United States, as I’ll explain later, was generally not known for its bridge-building capacities. But as building relational bridges increasingly became important to the Schaeffers, it led to tensions with that network and an eventual break from all support. (As an aside, it was during this time of

discernment and transition that Schaeffer came to Portugal in 1952 where my parents were working as new missionaries. During this visit, my father accompanied Schaeffer as he scoped out possible sites for a base of operations.)

If the ministry of Francis and Edith Schaeffer is new to you, it is helpful to know that in the mid-1950s they shifted from being Presbyterian missionaries in Europe to starting an independent learning community in southern Switzerland called L'Abri (which means 'shelter' in French). Within next two decades, hundreds of traveling, college-aged students came to L'Abri, seeking "honest answers to honest questions." Students committed a half-day to communal chores and a half-day to personal study. Joint meal times were (and still are) the centerpiece of L'Abri life where conversations affirmed everyone's questions and thus everyone's quest. In this setting of Christian hospitality, no person and no question were considered unwelcome. And in this beautiful setting of apologetic discussion and unconditional love, many students became Christian believers.

Elevating the importance of *The Question* is a central part of all L'Abri ministry. If you think about it, valuing the question is a way to value the other person. It means, "Your ideas and experiences are important to me. I can learn something from you." At the same time, questions are also windows into the life of the question asker. In an invitational way, they open up new and deeper realms of discussion. Altogether, questions are dialogical, dyadic, two-way, and therefore very relational. From this we can see how an ethos of inviting questions and responding to them unifies both intellectual activity and heart-zone, human relationality.

I recently visited a church where after sitting in the last pew, a man next to me leaned over and asked me, "Are you saved?" He then delivered to me a five-minute monologue about his own story of faith. What I observed was that his style of communication not only obstructed two-way dialogue, but also left me feeling rather defensive. By talking *to* me and not *with* me, I was the one who eventually put up a wall between us. True, he did start with a question, but since he had no genuine interest in me as a person with a personal backstory, personal questions, and so forth, there was no bridgework between us for a meaningful conversation.

By elevating a question-based approach to conversation, Schaeffer elevated the conversation partner. As Clarke Scheibe phrased it, Schaeffer "answered the person, not the question."[3] To be sure, the question was addressed, but the main point is that Schaeffer tuned into the heart-zone of the person and not just their ideas. His aim had nothing to do with winning a contest of ideas. As his oldest daughter Priscilla put it, "he wasn't just trying to get people saved; he really had an emotional involvement" which amounted to compassionate responses to the other.[4] But to even get to the place of having compassionate responses, Schaeffer had to first be a listener. In many ways, deep listening was his secret for connecting with others.

As a *listening missionary*, therefore, Schaeffer was somewhat ahead of his time in the Evangelical world of the mid-20th century. He was also ahead of the game with respect to a later cultural priority, articulated more at the start of the 21st century, to make "relationships first" before trying to change or resolve matters. Companies, for example, made shifts in this regard in their organizational cultures. As a restorative justice trainer, this concept of building relationships prior to managing processes toward resolution rings strong with me. It also speaks to the paradigmatic change brought by restorative justice to counterbalance legal concerns with relational concerns. Schaeffer, one could say, was counterbalancing apologetic concerns with relational concerns.[5] He eventually noted how this listening-based priority was essential for what he called "pre-evangelism."

Dimensions of Deep Listening

There are many dimensions to why and how Schaeffer was a good listener. One starting point for this is that his theology and anthropology supported good listening. Before even conversing with others, he knew there were at least four areas of

[3] Personal conversation with Clarke Scheibe (2018) who works at Canadian L'Abri, Victoria Island, BC.
[4] Follis, *Truth With Love*, 170.
[5] See "The Legal, but not only the Legal," in the appendices of *The God Who is There*, where Schaeffer emphasizes how a high view of personality and "the centrality of personal relationships" (160) serves to counter balance the Christian tendency to protect doctrine and promote absolutes.

commonality.[6] Schaeffer held a strong sense of sharing the same humanity with all people. “Once I accept myself as an equal to all men, I can talk as an equal to other men.”[7] The other person, therefore, no less than himself, was…

1. an image-bearer of God
2. a unique individual and personality
3. a whole person (not just a soul)
4. a transformable person (based on Christ’s work)[8]

Thus he could write in *True Spirituality* how “…it is wrong to have the wrong attitude in being right, and to forget that my relationship with my fellow men must always be personal.”[9] If Schaeffer could love himself, then he could love others in the same way, thus honoring Jesus’ second ‘love’ commandment. This attitude already sets up substantial bridgework for connecting with others, especially in bridging Christian and non-Christian realms. A sense of morality, an appreciation for beauty, a capacity to reason, an array of emotions (compassion, fear, disgust, longing), a matrix regarding human will (choice, freedom, responsibility, creativity), …the list could go on and on as one contemplates humanity’s correlatives to God the Creator. Schaeffer’s writings are known for highlighting these aspects of personality; clearly, it also informed the way he connected with others.

Another priority for Schaeffer that made him a good bridge-builder is that he was always listening to the trends of current culture. Because he immersed himself in what he called the “thought-forms” of modern society, he had a very natural set of bridges to draw from. By reading and appreciating the lyrics of Bob Dylan songs, for example, he could translate traditional church-lingo into terms the younger generation could understand. Edith Schaeffer provided a nice summary of the task at hand:

[6] Four-fold framing by Ted Lewis. See also the section, “Communicating to One of My Kind,” *The God Who Is There*, 119f.
[7] *True Spirituality*, 151. (Also, I’ve chosen to leave the male-based nouns and pronouns in quotes.)
[8] Regarding 1-3, *The God Who Is There*, 120-121; re: 4, True Spirituality, 346.
[9] *True Spirituality, The Completed Works* (Vol.3, Bk.2), 346 (or 153 in the Tyndale edition).

> A time of listening is needed—listening to what the next generation is saying, listening to the words of the music they are listening to, listening to the meaning behind the words. If true communication is to continue, there is a language to be learned.[10]

Every lecture I heard Schaeffer give (in the late 1970s and early 1980s) included a reference to a Woody Allen movie (and I do not exaggerate when I use the word 'every'). The mere fact that he could do this so consistently created a link between him and me, partly because it humanized him. I could now envision him sitting in a dark theatre as I did almost weekly during those years. The bottom line is that Schaeffer made the effort to read everything he could about the latest trends, events and artwork, so that he could *hear better* when others were asking their questions and describing their personal dilemmas. Being immersed in the modern world allowed him to be immersed in the conversation with the other person.

When being present with another, Schaeffer wanted to convey *empathy* based on common human experience before he might convey any *antipathy* toward ideas held dear by another. In *The God Who Is There*, Schaeffer describes how we should not try to expose the shortcomings of another's framework if we ourselves have not "lived open to the real questions" of life.

> One reason why I am able to talk to this kind of 20th century person is because I understand something of how dark it can be. Men must know that with integrity we have faced the reality of the dark path they are treading.[11]

Supporting the power of such identification is a study showing that people in recovery who sought addiction treatment had higher rates of positive change when meeting with counselors who explicitly conveyed empathy.[12]

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[10] Edith Schaeffer, *Tapestry*, 527-28.
[11] Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, 131-132.
[12] Miller and Moyers, "Is Low Therapist Empathy Toxic?" From the introduction they state, "High-empathy counselors appear to have higher success rates regardless of theoretical orientation. Low-empathy and

This kind of empathy requires a degree of vulnerability to share out of one's own experience of weakness. Earlier in the book Schaeffer writes, "Genuine love, in the last analysis, means a willingness to be entirely exposed to the person to whom we are talking."[13] There is a real solidarity aspect here. If our conversation partner might be exposed and feel vulnerable, then we should walk beside them and not above them. We too should "sympathize with their weaknesses," as Jesus did as a compassionate priest (Hebrews 4:15).

Having shown affirmation of his common humanity with the other, having shown appreciation for cultural thought-forms that reveal life's major questions, and having shown empathy toward the other person's personal dilemmas, Schaeffer was in a place where he could probe more deeply into the other person's thinking *without triggering defensiveness in the other person*. The final realm of being a good listener is that he could listen to the *tensions* that bundled or tangled within the other person's being. I think of him as having a mental stethoscope which allowed him to hear the 'beat' of inner inconsistencies that others could not hear within themselves.

William Edgar described how Schaeffer had an "uncanny ability to look deeply into a person's heart, uncovering secret aspirations and frustrations."[14] He would then bring these tensions to light, but again, with a sense of compassion, he knew when to not go too far, knowing that sometimes "taking the roof off" could be too troubling for a person.[15] There is a lot of vulnerability in admitting to your selves that aspects of your thinking are illogical. Much more could be said with respect to apologetics, but the part I am emphasizing here is that Schaeffer could only do this with integrity if he had first established a strong and personal bond with that person.

Later in this article, I will draw out parallels between this sort of apologetic conversation and the facilitation of peacemaking or reconciling dialogue. Just noting the common usage of the word *tension* in both contexts is quite telling. For now it is enough

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confrontational counseling, in contrast, has been associated with higher drop-out and relapse rates, weaker therapeutic alliance and less client change." (Psych. Addictive Behavior, Sept. 2013, 878-884.)

[13] *God Who Is There*, 120.

[14] Edgar, *Schaeffer on the Christian Life*, 190.

[15] Schaeffer used the metaphor of "taking the roof off" to explain how people shield their inner points of tension, and once those shields are removed, people stand "naked and wounded before the truth of what is." *The God Who Is There*, 129.

to say that all of key elements apply: authentic presence, storytelling, vulnerability, risk-taking, trust, being heard, probing deeper, working with dissonance, and 'ah-ha' shift moments. At the heart of this constellation of communication elements is the power of listening. As a listening missionary *par excellence*, you could say that Schaeffer's mission was to listen.

"I Know Exactly What You Mean"

When someone becomes a veteran listener, as mediators typically become after years of experience, they tune into what I have called a third element in human communication: being heard. They can sense when other people have or have not been heard well, and they are apt to explicitly check in until it happens. In the context of a dispute resolution process, it is common for someone who is stuck to finally say, "Now you finally get it. Now you understand." What this indicates is that in all of the previous sharing and listening, there was only a partial sense of information being mutually understood. But once a person feels heard, they feel it immediately, poignantly, and they usually affirm to the other how important that was to them. *Being heard* is essentially a major key to becoming unstuck from past narratives.

I had a personal experience of being heard by Francis Schaeffer that I want to share now. It illustrates how a deeper conversation takes time, meandering here and there, before it reaches a certain climax point where something very powerful happens within and between both parties. In the end, it is usually the experience of deep human connection that makes all the difference in the world, often having life-changing implications.

My journal of 1981 holds the following lines that I wrote after an opportunity to spend a day with Schaeffer as his chauffer. "Conversations with Francis were beautiful. I mean, we really talked…*He's a very good listener*." I was 23 at the time, and this was a couple years before he died in Rochester, Minnesota, where he was being treated for cancer. Given the proximity to the Twin Cities, it was possible for him to have speaking engagements there, provided he could return to Rochester on the same day. When

Dave Horn lined him up to speak at Bethel College and Seminary,[16] Dave asked me to be the driver. We picked up both Edith and Francis early morning and brought them home late that night. On both legs of the trip, Francis was in the front seat, providing him and I with several hours of conversation.

This was not my first encounter with him, nor was I unfamiliar with his writings or taped lectures. I had studied at English L'Abri a couple years earlier, and as a boy I had visited Swiss L'Abri with my parents.[17] But this occasion was the first time I had a long, one-to-one conversation with Schaeffer. As my journal entry reflects, I started out with safe topics for us to discuss. Looking back, I can see why it took me some time before I could be open about my inner struggles. Introverts generally need a longer prelude to get to that level. One of the reasons I want to share the following conversation in depth is to show how personal vulnerability takes time to open up while relational trust is built.

About an hour into our conversation I shared about my struggles with majoring in college and choosing one vocation. "I don't like to be limited," I said, referencing my fear of specialization and preference for the Renaissance ideal. He said, "Christians need to be involved in both areas, and both groups need each other. Sadly, there are too few in the generalist camp. It takes a bold person to be a generalist in our society today." (I guess he of all people should know that!) In retrospect I can now see his response as a validation that lifted me up. This kind of acknowledgement usually becomes an invitation for someone to go deeper into the same topic rather than jumping to a new topic.

I then shared with him that my real struggle was not so much a matter of narrowing down to have one major, but primarily about getting a degree. I didn't want to get a degree and follow the social expectations of a society that restricts your social and economic pathways. This may not seem like a difficult thing to share, but for me it was. In the context of my family and college setting, I really struggled with making a choice of integrity in the midst of a lot of high expectations. Perhaps it is not that different from

[16] The evening session was with Bethel faculty, during which Dan Taylor asked Schaeffer if there was anything, looking back, he would want to rethink. After a thoughtful pause, Schaeffer said, "I think I would rethink Kierkegaard."

[17] My mother Helen Lewis first came to Swiss L'Abri in 1964, due to her connection to L'Abri worker Franny Kramer (who was her violin teacher at Wheaton College). Following this visit, my mother instigated the first tour of the "L'Abri Ensemble" in Portugal. In 1969 and 1973, I was able to visit L'Abri at ages 10 and 14 year, and read *Escape from Reason* in high school.

today's young adults who wrestle with college choices in light of economic debt and environmental insensitivities. What's the right thing to do?

In response to this, Schaeffer explained how a degree is just a piece of paper, but it can be a springboard to help you reach your goals. "If getting it is a point of contention with your own integrity, then you're free to not get it." On the other hand, he commented, Rousseau and Gauguin sought freedom from society by escaping its expectations in order to reach the Bohemian ideal. "Just because the 60's hippies wore blue jeans and played guitars all day long doesn't mean they were free by doing those things. They may have been the most enslaved people during that decade!" All of this resonated with me. He understood 'my scene.' A year earlier I had unloaded my car and most of my possessions.

In retrospect, I appreciate how Schaeffer was both cautionary and affirming in his nuanced response. "Don't think that *not* getting a degree, in and of itself, will make you a freer person, disengaged from society. You can still go on and be a writer. You can do whatever you want. Yet again, you'll have to ask God for help here. It may be that not getting a degree will prove the best thing you could have done." At this point my mind was spinning in hard but new ways. I could feel my inner contradictions coming under the spotlight. One of these was my St. Francis rejection-pattern which sought personal freedom without any regard for future planning. But Schaeffer was also affirming the rebel part of me that did not want to acquiesce to social expectations. Again, this level of understanding and acknowledgement *gave me permission* to plumb deeper into my own tension points.

"You know," I said to him, "Something just dawned on me. I've been trying to rebel against society by identifying more with the 60s culture. But the fact is, I'm really out of the 70s generation and the 60s are over. I've seen how mad I am at the shallowness and impersonal-ness of the 70s. That's partly why I don't want to get the BA degree. I just don't want to conform to the expectations society has placed on me. I want to shape my own future."

His response came so naturally. "*I know exactly what you mean. I know exactly what you mean, exactly what you mean*." I was left speechless; I was overwhelmed with feelings and new thoughts. As we drove northward up Highway 52, he honored the

silence. I was deeply touched. Despite the chatter between Edith and Dave in the back seat, the front seat was a sacred zone. It was as if we had been walking around a European city and then entered a cathedral together, and the majestic space required a time of silence to take in the wonder of it all. In the wake of his response, I felt deeply understood and deeply heard, and that experience alone created a bond that still delivers a flowage of life to me. As I think back even now on the power of that moment, my eyes are watering up.

When our conversation resumed, we talked about lighter topics, such as how the 80s would unfold and the role of 'happenings' in the future of modern art. The previous shift point, however, was as defining as the climax of a novel. It brought me into new territory, a territory I could not have reached without a dyadic encounter with someone who cared enough about the ways I thought about life in a way that simultaneously affirmed and challenged me. As intellectual as the conversation may have seemed, the shift was foremost in the heart-zone. This same dyadic encounter is what victims of severe crime often say after they meet for dialogue with their offender in prison. "I can finally breathe again," they say.

As I now review all of the writings that speak about Schaeffer's style of engaging others, I recognize how one aspect of his style stands out above all others: his manner of listening led to others feeling heard. He had a way of engaging others conversationally that created a relational bond which indirectly opened others up to new ways of thinking. While his communication style amounts to loving others, it also opened the way for him to freely talk about Christian truth, knowing well that all ideas and beliefs are not equal but can be measured for the way they match up with the Bible and match up with the reality of people's life experiences. Altogether, he had a profound way to bring together affirmation and challenge. It is this connection between Christian love and Christian truth that I want to explore next.

Ugliness and Beauty in Communication

Now and then I have been drawing parallels between Schaeffer's conversational style of apologetic ministry and peacemaking dialogue processes for people addressing

harms and conflicts. Again, that convergence will be fully developed in the last part of this article. What is fascinating to me is that Schaeffer's unique *compassion-and-challenge* blend in his apologetic style owes much to his own experiences regarding harms and conflicts in the church world. Specifically, what he observed within conservative Presbyterian circles from the mid-30s to the mid-50s provided a context for him to rethink a biblical position on how Christians should handle their differences and divisions.

One way to summarize where Schaeffer arrived in his journey is that in wanting the world to see the reality of the God-Who-is-There, he sought a balance between showing the reality of God's *love* and the reality of God's *truth*. A key concept informing the work of L'Abri is that God's character, let alone, God's existence, needs to be *demonstrated* in observable ways. This demonstration, in the context of communal love and communication, was meant to be a sign of beauty, an attraction to all others. Conversely, if the balance was lost, and truth was shown by Christians without love, or love was shown without truth, it would lead to an ugliness that non-Christians would observe. Using the word 'ugly' is not commonplace for Christian writers, but it fits perfectly well for someone who was regularly drawn to art museums and galleries as a young adult.

The two guiding texts for Schaeffer, as presented in his booklet *The Mark of the Christian,* are John 13:35 and John 17:21.[18] The first is about Christians loving each other and the second about Christians being unified with each other. Schaeffer coupled them together not simply for the tie between servanthood and reconciliation; he was mostly interested in how both verses implicated a watching world. In this light, he called Christian love – and the unity it attests to – "the final apologetic," precisely because it verifies the realness of the triune God.[19] If *listening*, as presented above, can be understood as the hallmark representation of Schaeffer's love for others, than his *responding* can be understood as "speaking the truth *in* love." He never wanted to minimize the need for speaking "honest answers," which, again, takes us back to the

[18] "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35); "…that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us, so that the world may believe that thou hast sent me" (John 17:21).
[19] *Mark of the Christian*, 15.

intellectual apologetics he was committed to.[20] The key is that he balanced the presentation of truth with "observable love" which dignified the other as an equal.

How exactly did Schaeffer come to this balancing act? Historically, he came out of a social setting that was not known for modelling Christian love in the context of disagreement and debate. His fundamentalist and Presbyterian environment of the 1930s and 40s, as described in his own writings and letters, was cold, divisive, and often "ugly."[21] His experiences, nonetheless, became a crucible for his new thinking on how Christians can simultaneously stand for truth while showing unconditional love.

In 1935 Schaeffer had a front-row seat when conservative Presbyterians broke from liberal Presbyterians after George Machen was asked to leave Princeton Seminary. He followed his mentor-professors Allen MacRae and Carl McIntire who founded Faith Seminary, an offshoot of an offshoot (Westminster Seminary). This "separated movement" focused primarily on doctrinal purity to the neglect of respecting others. "We did not speak with love about those whom we differed, and we have been paying a high price for it ever since."[22] Schaeffer went on to explain how his separatist group "treated the liberals as less than human, and therefore they learned such bad habits that, later, when those who formed new groups developed minor differences among themselves, they continued to treat each other badly. Beware of the habits you learn in controversy."[23] Both the holiness of God and the love of God need to be shown simultaneously, but this, he said, will not come about automatically. Christians need to be steeped in this mindset in order to practice love when divisive situations arise.[24]

While doing pastoral work in the 1940s, Schaeffer also gave time to a Christian defense against Modernism. Many of his articles linked Barth to a neo-liberalism that presented a Modernist worldview. After moving to Europe in the latter 40s, he engaged in some intense correspondence with other conservative Presbyterians leaders who were in the United States. In the context of separatists forming further groups amidst internal divides, one of the key issues was association with the right or wrong people.

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[20] *Mark of the Christian*, 16.
[21] *The Church Before the Watching World*, 69; Dennis, *Letters of Francis A. Schaeffer.*
[22] *The Church Before*, 59.
[23] *The Church Before*, 62.
[24] *The Church Before*, 68-9

What comes to mind is the Pharisaic impulse to hyper-organize a framework of purity, specifically the purity of doctrine. By straining out the gnats of doctrinal impurity, entire camels were swallowed with respect to the uncaring ways people related to each other in the midst of debate and division. Schaeffer increasingly found himself troubled by the lack of what he started to call “reality.” By this he meant the reality of Christian truth and love working together in practice and being visible to others.

Taking the Roof Off Himself

This very real tension between Christian beliefs and Christian demonstration eventually culminated in a deep crisis for Schaeffer in the winter of 1951. You could say the contradiction “took the roof off” his own Christianity. His transformative ‘hayloft experience’ is often narrated as a personal crisis regarding belief and the loss of spiritual vigor. This longing for “reality” in his own life, however, was part and parcel with his observation of “little reality” among those who held to orthodox beliefs, but whose lives didn’t match what “the Bible so clearly says should be the result of Christianity.”[25] In a 1973 interview, Schaeffer clarified how his experiences as a pastor, leader and missionary from the mid-1930s to the early 1950s galvanized into one main question.

> Throughout this period one thing was dinned into my thinking: "Why," I asked, "is there so little reality among orthodox evangelical Christians? Why is there so little beauty in the way Christians deal with one another?" This led to doubts about the reality of spiritual things in my own life….With as much honesty as I could, I asked myself, "Was I right in becoming a Christian as a young man?" The unreality I had found in the Christian world, the ugliness I saw in Christian relationships, the fact that Christians were not able to talk to 20-century people, all these things made me ask, "Was I right?"[26]

[25] *True Spirituality*, Preface.
[26] Schaeffer, “Why and How I Write My Books,” *Eternity Magazine*, 1973.

Returning now to the set of letters mentioned earlier, Lane Dennis explains how these letters, full of controversy within the separatist Presbyterians, "lie as a background to the reawakening of spiritual reality in Dr. Schaeffer's life."[27] It is noteworthy that Schaeffer burned these letters in 1955 "as a kind of symbolic break with his own past and in repentance over something which he came to see had been deeply wrong."[28] There was no virtue to preserve a legacy of discord. At the time of burning, however, Schaeffer noted that he saved one letter. In fact, he quoted from this 1948 letter in later correspondence with the man who wrote that letter. Expressing solidarity with his partner, Schaeffer wrote:

> Your words, "I have used my Bible to hit and to embarrass those who could not see and read the way I did. I regret this time of my life. Our own strength, zeal and enthusiasm ends, usually like Peter's sword attack, in betraying the One we love" -- *this has been my own experience*. (italics mine)
> With greetings in the Lamb,
> FAS[29]

As telling as it is that Schaeffer burnt his former letters that reflected Christian ugliness and unreality, it is equally telling that he saved that letter as a reminder of where he himself once stood. He never changed his stance on the dangers of Catholicism or theological liberalism; he did change, though, with how he approached those encounters, "realizing that unless the existence and character of the dear Lord are exhibited in such moments, more is lost in 'winning' that would be the case in 'losing'.[30] We hear from this an echo of how missionaries can create walls or bridges. Since his articles and pamphlets in the early 50s were primarily aimed at Catholics and liberals,[31] he very likely had conversations in Europe where, in retrospect, he was convicted of creating needless walls.

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[27] Dennis, *Letters of Francis A. Schaeffer*, 13.
[28] Dennis, *Letters of Francis A. Schaeffer*, 13.
[29] Dennis, *Letters of Francis A. Schaeffer*, 69 (Letter of Aug 29, 1956.)
[30] Dennis, *Letters of Francis A. Schaeffer*, 66.
[31] See a full listing of articles by Schaeffer at: http://francisschaefferstudies.org/francis-schaeffer/works

One set of encounters, both in person and through letters, was with Karl Barth who lived in Basel. It is possible, though this is speculative on my part, that Schaeffer later realized he needed a different way to converse with "modern man." Barth's letter of reply to Schaeffer is quite sardonic, even playful, but it does include phrases that would have needled Schaeffer with respect to his style of communication. "You and your friends have chosen to cultivate a type of theology (which) consists in a kind of criminology" (meaning, I think, the activity of policing and passing convictions). "Your paper…reveals the fact of your decision to close your window shutters. I do not know how to deal with a man who comes to see and to speak to me in the quality of a detective-inspector or with the behavior of a missionary who goes to convert a heathen."[32] Again, Schaeffer never lessened his view on Barth's theology, but my guess is that a growing uneasiness for doing 'detective' work for the Lord added to his subsequent crisis of 1951.

To Schaeffer's credit, *he* was the one who was eventually convicted by the Spirit. He knew the separatist movement was in jeopardy for all of its infighting, intensified greatly by the aggressive approach of his Faith Seminary colleague Carl McIntire who edited the weekly *Christian Beacon* newspaper. Schaeffer had the humility to change course, expressing a new desire to learn how to show love in the context of his apologetic ministry. "God willing, I will push and politick no more….The mountains are too high, history is too long, and eternity longer….I have been a poor learner, but I'm further on than I was three years ago and I like it."[33]

This change, though, was not without a cost. As early as his 1950 publication of "The Balance of the Simultaneous Exhibition of God's Holiness and Love,"[34] he risked the wrath of fellow separatists who felt as though Schaeffer was going too soft on them. Also seeded prior to his crisis was his article, "The Secret of the Power and Enjoyment of the Lord," which further developed a balanced approach.[35] Jerram Barrs noted that

[32] Karl Barth's letter of Sept. 3, 1950, in The Post-Barth website, was Barth's reply to Schaffer's letter of August 28, 1950. Barry Hankins explains more about Schaeffer's wish to have amicable follow-up conversation with Barth in *Francis Schaeffer and the Shaping of Evangelical America*.
[33] Dennis, *Letters of Francis A. Schaeffer*, 39.
[34] Printed in Carl McIntire's *Christian Beacon* 1950 (add month), known also for its strong anti-communist stance during the McCarthy Era.
[35] Schaeffer, "The Secret of the Power & Enjoyment of the Lord," *Sunday School Times*, 1951. See also, Dennis, *Letters of Francis A. Schaeffer*, 32, regarding his April 14, 1951 letter.

"until his death, Schaeffer believed it was one of the most important things he had written."[36] By strumming the chords of love and unity in the context of preserving doctrinal purity, he was losing the support of many separatists.

Schaeffer's mounting confrontation with Presbyterians reached a high point during his 1953-54 furlough to the United States when he spoke 346 times in the course of a year and a half. He now had a burning new message for fundamentalists: a biblical teaching that combined the purity of truth with the power of love. "Don't divide into ugly parties!" he later wrote, or "you will lose your sons and daughters."[37] He noted in his correspondence of the time that "some are offended, others are profoundly changed." By bringing together truth and love, he was unlocking a new door to power and joy.

In concluding this section, it is clear that Schaeffer's crisis and transformation helped him shift from a cold-hearted to a warm-hearted Christianity. "Cold fundamentalism is a heresy in relation to God's love, just as cold liberalism is a heresy in relation to God's holiness."[38] This change, along with other factors, was vital in birthing the L'Abri Community which began in 1955 after the Schaeffers made a full break from their missionary support system in the United States. They truly wanted to foster a new kind of Christianity that demonstrated God's realness through all aspects of life and through all relationships, knowing that balanced attention to love and truth was a recipe for making all things beautiful.

Conflict as a Golden Opportunity

How this framework of love and truth was practiced throughout the life of L'Abri and Schaeffer's next three decades of ministry could fill another article. His apologetic ministry certainly benefited from a maturing, bridge-building style of conversation. For our purposes here, I want to focus more on how this framework also applied, for Schaeffer, to the realm of peacemaking and reconciliation over conflicts and divisions among Christians.

[36] Barrs, "Francis A. Schaeffer: The Later Years."
[37] *Mark of the Christian*, 69.
[38] Dennis, *Letters of Francis A. Schaeffer*, 70 (from a 1958 letter to the man who wrote the 1948 'unburned' letter).

We usually do not think of love as being the chief virtue expressed during a sharp conflict. But for Schaeffer, this is precisely the realm where love can shine the brightest. Returning to *The Mark of the Christian* as introduced earlier, we recall two main themes. First, 'one-another' love between Christians identifies them to others as true Christians. Second, unity between Christians is a basis for non-Christians to have initial belief in God. The application of this love and unity, as section headings of his book map out, include apology, forgiveness, disagreements, expression of regret, and reconciliation, all of which can have an observable dimension for a "watching world."

Does this mean that Christians end up setting aside their differences in order to show their oneness to others? Not at all. Schaeffer was equally concerned about the way Christians visibly show God's holiness no less than showing God's love. His entire ministry revolved around taking strong stances on biblical truth and morality. It is not that differences become secondary; it is rather that efforts to discuss and voice differences are strongly guided by the relational values of respect and humility. Moreover, where differences become *stronger* between people or groups, "it becomes proportionately more important to speak for God's holiness. And it becomes increasingly important in that place to show the world that we still love each other."[39] Unfortunately, as Schaeffer points out, the reverse of this is often the case: the greater the differences, emotions tend to reduce a show of love.

What I like about this is that Schaeffer understood how a conflict situation between Christians can become the ideal place for sacrificial love to shape communication dynamics. While most people view conflict as an obstacle, Schaeffer saw conflict between Christians as an opportunity. "It is in the midst of our differences that we have a golden opportunity."[40] Without this perspective, the human default response is Fight or Flight. This is part of our animal instinct (and if you are more like a rabbit, you just Freeze). When faced with a threatening situation, we protect ourselves either by *attack* mode or *avoid* mode (or, again, by a paralysis mode). In all of these cases, we act without thinking about it.

[39] *Mark of the Christian,* 27.
[40] *Mark of the Christian,* 31.

Being mindful of our default-level impulses, however, people can respond in calmer ways and stay present to a hard situation. A classic example is Jesus in the early morning of Good Friday. He is not fighting back; he is not trying to leave. He is simply present in a very strong and centered way. This higher, third-way response requires both love and humility which helps us to see the humanity of the other, to listen better, restrain our words, and to speak in ways that give life and newness. Rather than adding more tension to a problem that divides people from each other, peacemaking communications help to reset problems in a zone where people can let down their guards, allowing something good to emerge from it.

In a fallen world, conflict is not bad, but simply inevitable. Nevertheless, the fallout can be bad or good depending on the way in which people respond and deal with the situation. Schaeffer mentions how bitter things said by Christians in the midst of their differences can "stick in the mind like glue."[41] This brings a double fallout. First, it affects the interior lives of those who hold onto strong feelings, binding them to the past. Second, when relational separation is visible to others, it affects the way others measure the value of Christian faith. "If, when we feel we must disagree as true Christians, we could simply guard our tongues and speak in love, in five or ten years the bitterness would be gone. Instead of that, we leave scars -- a curse for generations."[42] The rest of the world will not understand the content of *why* Christians disagree, but they will "smell the stench" of *how* Christians divide from each other.

How interesting it is at this point in the essay to make a connection between a peacemaking apology and an apology for biblical Christianity. One mends, the other defends. In Greek, the word 'apology' meant "to make a defense of one's self," and this later applied to oral or written statements about truth claims. Hence, apologetics. Paul, for example, makes a defense of the gospel throughout the Book of Acts. After the time of Shakespeare a puzzling transition took place. The original meaning of a self-justification for an excusable action shifted more toward a remorseful statement about an inexcusable action. An apology now, ironically, meant that you were letting down your personal defenses in order to express sorrow for regrettable actions. Note the

[41] *Mark of the Christian,* 23.
[42] *Mark of the Christian,* 23.

vulnerability that comes with this. And yet it is also life-giving. All societies socialize their children into saying "sorry" as a way to grow healthy individuals and sustain healthy communities.

Both apologist and apologizer, therefore, are navigating realms of defense and vulnerability. And if a conversation partner in either context is meeting you with compassion and interest, there is a relational dynamic that invites greater openness and connection. Whether the roof is taken off of someone's intellectual framework or off their personal reputation, exposure to the truth of one's true self, hard as it is, leads to a new future, a restoration of sorts. I think of these moments as a miniature death over what the ego has protected for so long, and in that death, a new resurrection takes place. The main point of this whole essay, though, is that in both peacemaking and apologetic situations, relational bridge-building is the decisive factor.

And so we have come full-circle back to Schaeffer as a deep listener and a compassionate responder, as one who formed bonds of solidarity before earning the right to challenge or confront someone on equal footing. What a journey from the separatist Presbyterian ethos exemplified by the self-justifying Pharisee who said, "I'm glad I'm not like others," through a time when he "had to go back and rethink (his) whole position,"[43] and then arriving at a place where he wept over Christians who emphasized their 'otherness' from those who did not share their faith. It is interesting that at the end of *The Mark of the Christian,* Schaeffer included a poem which bids the reader to "weep for those who do the work of the Lord with a high look and a proud heart."[44]

Substantial Healing in Relationships

Throughout his lectures and writings, Schaeffer coined the term "substantial healing" as a way to converge two key concepts. The first is *human imperfection* which implies limits to everything we do or experience in a fallen world. The second concept is objective, *observable reality* that can demonstrate God's existence and character in our world today. A healing process, therefore, will never be complete, but it can be sufficient

[43] *True Spirituality*, Preface. See also Luke 18:10f.
[44] "Lament" by Evangeline Paterson (from Deep Is the Rock; also printed in Christianity Today 1966).

to illuminate the work of God's grace and power in the midst of divisions. "It conveys the idea of a healing that is not *perfect*, but that is real, evident, and substantial. Because of past history and future history, we are called upon to live this way now by faith."[45] This concept is developed fully at the end of True Spirituality where Schaeffer applies "substantial healing" to psychological and relational realms.[46]

As Jesus modeled in multiple healing stories in the Gospels, a healing process is always participatory. Jesus engages people in a way that lifts up their 'response-ability' to receive healing power. We read about head- and heart-based responses that reflect openness and longing. Understandably, stories with faith-filled responses are the ones worth saving; we do not read about stories of resistance or non-participation. (This changes, however, when we shift over to other encounter-stories in the Gospels which do not involve healing.) The idea of willing a positive change relates very well to a bridge-building communication style that first opens up a person toward possible change, and then emboldens them to take the risk of *leaning into* that very change. In theological terms, this involves a *proleptic* lean, an assent to a new future that God is bringing about.

In the tradition of Jesus (and perhaps the early Hasidic masters of 18th century Eastern Europe),[47] Schaeffer, being similarly itinerant in his ministry, encountered people in a way that allowed memorable anecdotes to be preserved. Here we see an interesting tie between stories of healing and stories of thought-shift. Most anecdotes pare down to the essential dialogue that includes both question and response. Typically, the master finds a way of adding something novel into the mix: an unexpected word, an unconventional idea, indeed, "things hidden" since the foundation of the world. The encounter climaxes with a moment where things in tension (an unhealed body, a conflict, contradictory thoughts, etc.) are transformed into a new zone of holism. Similarly to the field of conflict resolution, a "solution" is found. For Schaeffer, the reaching of a solution is in contradistinction to the need for one side to win.[48]

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[45] *Pollution and the Death of Man*, 68.
[46] *True Spirituality*, chapters 10-13. Substantial healing is possible but not perfect, 134.
[47] Buber, Martin, *Tales of the Hasidim (Early Masters, Later Masters),* first published in the 1930s in German.
[48] *Mark of the Christian*, 29.

Not every person, however, responds positively to an opening-up process. In their new-felt vulnerability, they may choose to not risk the cost of personal change. The classic Gospel story is that of the rich young ruler. When Jesus 'took the roof off' of the inconsistency between maintaining a safe, personal morality and embracing a radical, kingdom morality, the prospect of change was too much to bear for the young man. This resistance is fairly commonplace throughout the Gospels (as in the Hasidic tales); it actually highlights the significance of human freedom and responsibility. Meanwhile, the communication dynamics between sage and student can teach us much about how certain encounters can be either effective or ineffective. Every piece of communication either adds to a new bridge or to a new wall.

The thesis of this essay, in review, is that Schaeffer's style of communication owed its effectiveness to his enlightened position on how Christians should model respectful conversation in their conflicts and differences with each other. Given his own biographical convergence between Christian peacemaking and Christian apologetics, it should not surprise us to find strong commonalities between the general fields of restorative, peacemaking dialogue and conversations inviting what I am now calling *thought-shift* regarding the ideas a person holds dear. The remainder of this essay will map out some parallels in three main areas.

1. Deep Human Connection in the Early Stages

Just as Schaeffer focused on what he had in common with his conversation partner (human pathos, shared experience, cultural thought forms, being in God's image, etc.), a restorative dialogue facilitator (in either harm or conflict situations) similarly expresses their 'withness' with other people in early stages of a healing or resolution process. This is not about technique; it is about being genuinely present to other people. There is an intuitive set of capacities that grow over time which are remarkably similar for both the respect-driven apologist and the veteran dialogue facilitator. These include Authentic Presence, Deep Listening, Reframing loaded statements, Ego-taming (no desire to win), Acknowledgements and Affirmations, and giving the other person the Gift of Being Heard. All of these being-oriented skills stem

from empathy that is conveyed to the other. Schaeffer's preferred word here is 'compassion.'[49]

L'Abri ministries are often characterized as being overly intellectual, rational, and thus too heady. But when conversation content is paired with the subjective, interpersonal dynamics between two subjects, we can observe a greater balance between the head and heart zones. Schaeffer highlights this in an interview:

> "People feel your attitudes, and I don't think you can put this on, as a trick….If you're struggling for empathy, for human relationships, not acting as though you are a guru, and not standing higher than they are, I am convinced that there is such a thing as a mentality that comes across."[50]

The word "mentality" is telling in this context since it conveys more of an intuitive, energetic connection between people. Altogether, we are dealing with a relational dynamic which precedes and then parallels the more explicit verbal exchange of ideas. There is no head-heart split here; trust-building from one person to another is vital to the prospect of someone accepting the trustworthiness of new truth claims. If you want to feed a wild animal, it takes time to build up trust on a non-verbal level.

I am now going to shift back to peacemaking dialogue. Part of the art of facilitation, according to restorative practitioner Mark Umbreit, is that a "non-directive approach" between two parties serves better to elicit the best within people to blossom forth. This approach gives more empowerment and response-ability to people for engaging their own issues. Due to the vulnerability that is common when people discuss sensitive topics in their lives, a strength-based approach helps to balance that vulnerability by lifting up *the positives* latent in the other person. The irony in this approach is that it gives them greater personal permission to openly face and address *the negatives* they are wrestling with. The opposite of this whole framework --- where there might be an aggressive apologetic approach or an over-directive facilitative

[49] In his chapter, "The Persistence of Compassion," *Death in the City*, 72, Schaeffer writes how in his own experience, "giving the realistic message does not turn people off—if they feel real compassion in you."
[50] Colin Duriez interview with Schaeffer on Sept 30, 1980 (*Francis Schaeffer: An Authentic Life,* 213).

approach --- places others in a defensive posture where they will cling all the more to their positions or default narratives.

Restorative justice pioneer Howard Zehr often speaks of the three 'Rs' that describe the primary values of restorative work: Respect, Relationship, Responsibility.[51] In review of the bridge-building presence and skills presented above, it is easy to see all three at work in both conversational ministries as well as resolution processes. When these connective values are lacking, there is no reason why anyone in their 'positionalism' or narrative 'stuckness' would have motivation to shift out of a defensive posture and open up to the reconfiguration of their perspectives. But through deep, human connectivity in the early stages of a dialogue, people find themselves in a place of new openness, even when they feel a discomfort with the thought of thought-shift. This fits well with Schaeffer's preference for "discussions to try to win the person than have debates to try to win the argument."[52]

In summary, the human bonding that takes place in the front end of a hard but helpful conversation allows a person to take a calculated risk to venture further into deeper realms toward that inner point of tension that is thwarting peace of mind. Paradoxically, people move from "strength to strength" precisely because they willingly move from vulnerability to vulnerability. This can only happen when they have gained enough trust in the other person who is serving as a guide through uncharted territory.

2. Respectful Engagement with Narrative Clash

In an interview with Philip Yancey, Schaeffer mentioned an oft-repeated scenario. "If I have only an hour with someone, I will spend the first 55 minutes asking questions and finding out what is troubling their heart and mind, and then in the last 5 minutes I will share something of the truth."[53] This certainly reinforces what this article has been suggesting all along: Schaeffer was good at listening and good at connecting with others. There are, however, other variants of this hypothetical anecdote which

[51] Zehr, *The Little Book of Restorative Justice.*
[52] Parkhurst, *Francis Schaeffer: The Man and His Message*, 88.
[53] Yancey, 1978 interview with Francis Schaeffer.

shine additional light on this topic. In his 1968 Wheaton College lectures he said that if he had just an hour with a "really modern man" on a train, he would "spend 45 to 50 minutes on the negative, to really show him his dilemma—to show him he is more dead than even he thinks he is….Then I'd take 10 or 15 minutes to preach the gospel."[54] Two important things are worth noting. The first is that Schaeffer's modified version ten years later reflects a stronger emphasis on Receiving something from the other person rather than just Giving something. He's more of a mindful listener than a speaker. Note also the coupling of heart and mind in the first anecdote.

The second observation has to do with tapping into "the negative" and giving it more time. This relates, in part, to the point of tension discussed above. One may recall Frederick Buechner's line, "The Gospel is bad news before it is good news."[55] For Schaeffer, though, this was not just about being honest over bad things in the world and in one's self. His pre-suppositional approach to human thinking led him to identify the "bad news" of contradictions or inconsistencies that operate within an individual's patterned way of thinking. Just as interpersonal conflicts cause rubbing or friction which leads to estrangement between people who lose trust in each other, so in the realm of ideas, Schaeffer had a way of helping people both feel and understand the rubbing and friction within their own thinking that created a lack of real peace. He would agree that there is often a clash between a person's narrative of reality and the truth of a biblical metanarrative. The goal is to bring one's own personal narrative into better alignment with God's narrative.

The respectful apologist and seasoned facilitator, therefore, both enter their work with a realistic understanding of human tensions at the epicenter of conversation. You could say they both traffic in "the negative." At the same time, they understand the personal dimension, conveying empathy. People may present various conflicts or related stories circling around the epicenter, but facilitators know that all transformative discussions need to move toward the deepest hurt or regret (or, in Schaeffer's context, the deepest contradiction). This perspective heightens compassion and patience. It allows the facilitator to trust their own intuitions about where to take things next. In

[54] Schaeffer, *Death in the City*, 70.
[55] Buechner, *Telling the Truth: The Gospel as Tragedy, Comedy and Fairy Tale.*

mediation lingo, things are more “dialogue-driven” then they are “settlement-driven.” This conversational framework is a far cry from a courtroom setting that restricts timeframes and information, and where professionals hold all the power and thus control the process.

One reason there are tensions at the epicenter is because there are also limits on knowing the whole truth. All interpersonal conflicts have an objective truth, but that does not mean both sides see it the same way or know all the pieces. Perhaps both have contributed to an escalating situation that charged up emotions from all of the rubbing. This informs the subjective dimension. Both parties may hold to narratives that blame the other for the problem. At worst, the other person *is* the problem. This level of clash (or contradiction) can only be resolved if parties have the courage to come together, find validation for their respective experiences, and express humility by owning their contributions. In this zone of dialogue (due to authentic human connection), clashing narratives get rewritten into a shared narrative that both sides can rest with. This creates a new truth to live by which is likely closer to the objective truth of what happened in the past. At the same time it is strengthened by the subjective truth of connecting with the other person in the present moment. The hard emotions and mistrust that once clouded one’s perspective give way to inner peace and restored trust.

Resolution facilitators, therefore, guide people into a deepening journey around the tension points between clashing narratives, acting as midwives to a resolution process. But they do not fix the problem for others; they empower others to fix their own problems through dialogue. ‘Ah-ha’ moments are vital in this sequence, for without them, people will remain stuck in the past. The conversational apologist likewise assists others to deepen their awareness of the tension points within their own lives and thinking, to the end of midwifing ‘ah-ha’ moments that are transformative. Schaeffer was very aware of the discomfort this can create, not wanting the person to feel trapped, but giving space for them to retreat. Jerram Barrs wrote how…

> He would say to us (and he would model for us): “Always leave someone with a corner to retire gracefully into. You are not trying to win an argument or to knock someone down. You are seeking to win a person, a person made in the image of

> God. This is not about your winning; it is not about your ego. If that is your approach, all you will do is arouse their pride and make it more difficult for them to *hear* what you have to say."[56] (italics mine)

The counterpart to this in the world of mediated dialogue is how parties can take breaks or even terminate their involvement at any time since the process is voluntary from start to end. By maintaining the values of respect, relationship and responsibility, people find greater courage to face the hard tensions in their lives and work toward something new that no longer sustains the old rubbings.

3. Shift Happens When 'the New' Takes Hold

The key element that helps a person shift from one position to another is what I call the 'in-breaking of the New.' Even though a healing dialogue process can go on for hours (just as Schaeffer would often stay up past midnight with others), there is generally one new thought or one new thing heard that serves to unravel the tension of one's deepest point of mistrust or contradiction. Typically, anyone at the start of a hard conversation is not fully aware of all the issues that are rubbing uncomfortably within themselves. But they likely have some intuition that something is amiss and something needs to change, be it in their life-perspective or in their relationships with others. As described above, a bridge-building experience allows them to open up to possible change, and thus the deeper they journey into the conversation, the more likely they will be able to name the core issues at stake. I think of this as going from a jumble of thoughts to a more simplified or clarified view of things.

At some point in this filtering process, *one* significant idea or expression is heard which serves as a catalyst to dissolve the tensions at that epicenter of one's thinking or living. It helps greatly when we see a familiar old thing from a fresh new angle. It also erodes the default shields we put up to guard our inner world. 'The New' begins to seed a hope that real change is possible. This is where the art of silence can play a big role (as Schaeffer demonstrated in my conversation with him on the road). Culturally, we

[56] Jerram Barrs, "Francis Schaeffer: The Man and His Message" (online).

show discomfort for silence in conversation settings. But when we have an ‘ah-ha’ moment for how a narrative element has not served our best interests but instead has been part of the problem, such a realization needs a sacred, dignifying space to stretch itself and slowly come to fruition. In the context of reconciliation, one might internally hear the following: “I had no idea that my actions would have had such a difficult impact on you. But now I can see why you were so troubled by what I said.” Or in the context of apologetics, “I had no idea that my belief of ‘whatever will be will be’ or ‘everything that happens is meant to be’ has had such a detrimental effect on me over the years. It reinforced my evasion of personal ownership.”

The naming of interests (needs) or impacts (harms) in the world of facilitated dialogue is as powerful as the naming of core issues in our personal beliefs and thinking patterns. As new daylight enters into our roofless house, we name the narrative elements that were dysfunctional due to their conflicting nature, and we name aspects of a shared narrative that promise peace of mind and newness of life. By naming what is true within us, or between us and others, we disarm the power those things held over us. Clashing narratives, thereby, are transformed into new narratives where information can fit together better without rubbing, without causing friction, without being co-dependent on inner consistencies. This is truly a healing process; separated parts are now made into new wholes. The gift of the New at times can feel so great that we actually give thanks for the dissonance that paved the way for the one new thought to be heard and distinguished, giving us the impetus to name the negatives and move onward in life.

When *shift happens*, the past no longer holds sway over a person’s inner life; the future is now open with new possibilities. If there is deep trauma involved, there is likely no forgetting of the past. But forgiveness helps us to re-member the past in new ways, ways that give life, not death. All of this is Christian conversion in micro-form. We are no longer determined by past sins and the realm of death; God’s future grace is now determinant, instilling in us a new motivation to live in the daylight of our new realizations. We turn away from thought patterns that led more to decay, and we sow our seeds to the Spirit of new life. This unity and oneness also extends to the relational level. A reconciling process with someone with whom we felt tense separation now

brings atonement, literally, from Old English, *at-one-ment*. We no longer harbor hard feelings; the process of listening and agreeing (Matthew 18) has allowed us to "forgive from the heart" (final verse).

Earlier I used the phrase "strength to strength"[57] as also involving a movement from "vulnerability to vulnerability." This truly involves a shift at both head and heart levels that profoundly happens in a relational, dyadic encounter when our inner negatives are overwhelmed by new positives. Facilitators of peacemaking dialogue essentially ensure that sufficient positives are generated in order to outweigh the negatives that have dominated people's memories and perceptions. The most standard catalytic element in this regard is the verbal apology. Similarly, Schaeffer's capacity to bond with the humanity of others generated a sufficient quotient of positivity to compel his conversation partners to face their own negatives and shift into new zones of thinking and living.

Final Thoughts: Peace and Righteousness Will Kiss

At one point in his letters, Schaeffer recounts how one of his Presbyterian separatist colleagues thought Schaeffer had gone "too soft" in his ministry when he harmonized a witness to God's truth and a witness to God's love. But as we learned from his journey in the early 1950s, Schaeffer understood this blended stance as being more consistent with a biblical approach to display a "true spirituality," let along, to reach others effectively. He also grew to understand how a lack of balance can create more harm than good. This, blend, you could say, is precisely why his (and L'Abri's) ministry was (and is) uniquely powerful.

The rise of restorative justice, with its preference for facilitated dialogue processes, has similarly restored a blended balance within the realms of criminal justice and conflict resolution. In the old paradigm, accountability and support are viewed as operating in tension with each other. If you are "hard on crime" (the positive political option), then you advocate for high accountability and low support. "Soft on crime" (the negative option) implies the opposite. The fallacy in this framing is the assumption that

[57] Psalm 84:7. Making pilgrimage through the "valley of Baka" meaning, "valley of weeping."

accountability and support cannot rise together but only operate inversely to each other. But there is a third option. Being “smart on crime” views both elements working together. Unsurprisingly, offenders of crime are more apt to change when they receive dignifying supports while being held accountable for their actions in meaningful, non-punitive ways. Again, we are reminded of the three R’s at work: Respect, Relationship, and Responsibility.

This blending is also the essence of good parenting: showing constant care for your children while consistently holding to clear boundaries. The imbalance, with great harm, comes from the two deep ends: authoritarian or permissive approaches. It is unfortunate that our western justice system has maintained the moral imagination to view the authoritarian approach as the only viable option. Extending this discussion to apologetics, one can see how a hardline approach in the fight for truth can cause more damage than good. Conversely, the combination of love and truth reinforces a style of communication that builds-bridges and opens people up to the prospect of deep change and newness. Rather than using external, fear-based disincentives, Schaeffer’s conversational ministry and restorative dialogue both prize internal, truth-awakening incentives for personal change.

The Bible also lifts up this blended approach with its writings that unify the core relational concepts of justice, peace, love, and truth into a vibrant matrix. Psalm 85, a classic passage on God’s restorative redemption, gives us a picture of this cohesion.

> Steadfast love and faithfulness will meet;
> righteousness and peace will kiss each other.
> Faithfulness will spring up from the ground,
> and righteousness will look down from the sky. (vs.10,11)

We actually need to add more English words into this matrix since the Hebrew words are so rich in meaning. Steadfast love includes our sense of mercy; faithfulness is allied to Hebrew words for truth and trust. Righteousness is akin to justice (and synonymous in New Testament Greek). Peace, as *shalom*, carries strong associations of wholeness and restored order. The New Testament, interestingly enough, widens peace from the

realm of ends to the realm of means (James 3:18). Traditional justice systems worldwide that prefer hard, punitive approaches, with diminished attention to relational and communal dimensions of harm, generally favor the isolation of these biblical categories from each other. Truth and justice, for example, are disassociated from love, mercy and peace, in the name of objectivity and fairness. But the cost of this separation, no less than what Schaeffer experienced among fundamentalist Presbyterians in the mid-20th century, is a testimony at odds with biblical teaching. At some point, the logic cannot hold.

The nexus between love and truth is trust. Relational trust is essential to help people rely on the trustworthiness of new truth content. In some respects, Schaeffer paved the way for conversational apologetic ministry in postmodern times,[58] given how trust is an essential element not only with respect to the intensified questioning of truth claims, but also with respect to postmodern views on power and victimization. In his own life journey, Schaeffer found a way to integrate truth and love in a way that bore new life-fruit for those who had conversation with him. In my own experience with dialogue-based resolution processes, a similar integration takes place that truly helps people to work through hard but healing conversations. They too find strength through vulnerability and taste the life-fruit that comes from heart-to-heart conversation.

In today's world, *narratives of division* are commonplace. We have seen how such narratives can operate in interpersonal realms of conflict no less than they operate through the lenses of one's worldview. Narratives of division are certainly operative in political realms where partisan wars are becoming the norm. We can also recognize narratives of division in the Bible. Peter needed a divine vision that confronted his narrow narrative of Jewish-Gentile division. You could say that while he was *on* the roof, God took *off* the roof of his contradictory beliefs! Jesus deconstructed narratives of division when he challenged the conservative purity codes of his day.

Deep down, however, all of us hold narratives of division toward other people with whom we have lost trust over the years. These narratives serve to preserve the status quo and lock us into the past. The life-example of Francis Schaeffer, however, inspires us to overcome these narratives with a better narrative. At the end of *True*

[58] Follis makes a case for this in *Truth With Love*, 15.

Spirituality, Schaeffer talks about substantial healing in personal relationships. His main example involves an offending person coming to grips with how they have hurt another person and then taking the initiative to apologize. Recalling his earlier chapter about confessing sins of the past and finding freedom of conscience, Schaeffer invited his readers to now review past relational hurts, "even if it was twenty years ago."[59]

> The same thing is true in human relationships. If I know that somewhere back in my life I have dealt with some Christian, or some non-Christian, on less than a really human basis, I must go back if possible, pick up the pieces, and say, "I'm sorry." Many can vouch for the fact that there have been springs of living water and dews of refreshment when they have gone back, knocked on somebody's door, and apologized – even after many years.[60]

Schaeffer then goes on to link this exhibit of love and communication as aligning with the *kenotic* (or emptying) mindset of Christ, referencing Philippians 2:5f.[61] Just as the crucifixion was real and out in the open, person-to-person confession and truth-telling takes place in an open, vulnerable place for others to see. It is a witness. Again, we circle back to the love and unity of Schaeffer's favorite verses in John 13 and 17. Reconciliation of past hurts and estrangements reveals the beauty of God's character. All of this points toward the need for "orthodoxy in human relationships."[62]

Schaeffer's example to me is an inspiration to face unreconciled relationships of the past with honesty and to prayerfully open ourselves up to a peacemaking process where trust-building and truth-telling can unfold together, seasoned with mercy, so that right-making and peace can kiss. This involves both vulnerability and risk, and yet all acts of real redemption involve the same. As this takes courage to find love and compassion to 'go the distance' we have to remember that resistance is natural.

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[59] *True Spirituality*, 159. Is twenty years an arbitrary number? On page 104, Schaeffer references his own 20 struggle with his conscience which may either correspond to the twenty years between his 1951 crisis and the 1971 publishing of TS, or the 20 year stretch between his conversion to Christianity (1930) and his crisis.
[60] *True Spirituality*, 159.
[61] See also, "God's Communication Style is Kenotic," by Ted Lewis, 2003 (online article).
[62] *True Spirituality,* 164.

Narratives of division rely on the lie or contradiction that people can truly be independent from each other, and that coexistence is not possible. But the truth, of course, is that human beings are far more connected to each other than we want to admit. We are all wounded-wounding creatures. We all have an inner victim and an inner offender, thus giving us the capacity to have dual-solidarity with all people, especially those with whom we have had conflictual rubbings in the past.

Facilitators, making things 'easy' (*facile*), can play a crucial role in holding a space where safe, constructive conversation happens. There are times when two people simply need a third-party helper to strengthen the trust factor. Just as there was some formality in setting up a space and time for Schaeffer and others to have conversation, some degree of intentionality is needed for peacemaking conversations. In fact, it requires this sort of formality in order to honor the sacredness of heart-to-heart conversation. Once that space is held, and people risk themselves into it with both honesty and hope, the wonders of listening and being understood can unfold, opening up new information and thus new possibilities. The roof of our unhelpful narrative 'shields' can be lifted away. A greater sense of *human kindness* (in both senses of the phrase) can be found. Shift happens. Substantial healing in relationships is real and possible.

The connection between apology and apologetics was noted earlier in this article. Shifts in relational trust as well as thought-shifts both draw life from the sacrificial yet willing death of protective pride. But who can name and disarm pride when one's defenses are on high alert? The reason both Schaeffer's style of apologetic ministry and restorative peacemaking hold promise to help people move forward in life is because they both invite people to be vulnerably open to newness without any compromise to their human dignity. Both processes, being highly relational and conversational in nature, have a way to limit the role of human pride, and thus they foster the role of humility. Christians should not be surprised at this unfolding. It is built into the very pattern of death and resurrection that allows for growth and new life.

This sort of transformation requires a bridge! Humanity's distance from God required a bridge. Simone Weil wrote that through the cross, "God personally crossed

the maximum distance, the infinite distance, because no other could do it."[63] This involved God's plunge into the negatives of our world, our lives, and our experiences. What relationality; what bonding! What incentive for us to cross the distances between ourselves and others when negatives comes between us. Thankfully, there are relational models of mediation and facilitation that can guide us with supports into transformative newness, be it through apologies or apologetics. We never need be alone in our journeys of finding peace of mind. Thankfully, Francis Schaeffer, through his own humble learning, seeded a style of conversational ministry, which, like restorative dialogue, abounds with life.

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[63] Simone Weil, "The Love of God and Affliction," *Waiting for God*.

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