

# Francis A. Schaeffer (1912-1984): Lessons from His Thought and Life

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## Why Study the Life and Thought of Francis Schaeffer?<sup>1</sup>

There are two ways that this question could be asked. First, why study any historical figure? And second, why specifically reflect on the life and thought of Francis Schaeffer? After all, what makes him so important to reflect on in contrast to other people?

The simple answer to the first question is that we want to *learn* and be *challenged* by Christian men and women who have gone before us. In Scripture the theme of people serving as role models for us, both positively and even negatively, is abundantly clear. Paul encourages Timothy to follow his example, as he follows Christ (see 2 Tim 3:10-13). Hebrews 11 records for us the “Hall of Fame” of faith in order to challenge us to press on in our devotion and service to the Lord. As we examine the lives of godly men and women, both their strengths and weaknesses, we learn how better to serve our Lord today. And often as we do so, we are awakened from our spiritual lethargy by unique servants of the Lord who sought, in their lives, to serve the Lord with their whole heart.

Furthermore, it is important to study contemporary historic figures as well as those of the more distant past. Why? For the simple reason that contemporary people help us better to respond to the specific issues and challenges of *our* own day, not just the issues of a previous era. In this sense there is a parallel with the doing of theology. For just as *theology* must

be constantly written to apply the unchanging Word to a changing world, so we need to study contemporary individuals who can better help us to respond faithfully, without compromise, to present-day challenges that confront the church.

But why study Francis Schaeffer? The answer to this second question is that there is probably no single figure that has affected and impacted evangelicalism in the latter half of the twentieth century more than Francis Schaeffer. For this reason alone, we need to take him seriously. Michael Hamilton, in commenting on the impact of Francis Schaeffer on evangelicalism, says this about his life and work:

When Francis Schaeffer first appeared on the American scene in 1965, evangelicals hardly knew what to make of him. He was 53 years old. His Christian faith had been formed in the furnace of the fundamentalist-modernist controversies of the 1930s, and he was a card-carrying member of the impeccably fundamentalist Bible Presbyterian Church. He defended passionately the idea of the inerrancy of Scripture, a doctrine that had already seen some slippage in evangelical circles.

Yet this was no ordinary fundamentalist preacher. He and his wife, Edith, had lived for ten years in a student commune they had started in the Swiss Alps. When he lectured, he wore an alpine hiking outfit—knickers, knee socks, walking shoes. By 1972 he had added to his already singular appearance long hair and a white tufted goat’s-chin beard. Most curious of all, he seldom quoted from the Bible. He was more apt to

talk about the philosophical importance of Henry Miller (then regarded as the most pornographic writer in American letters).

During the next two decades the Schaeffers organized a multiple-thrust ministry that reshaped American evangelicalism. Perhaps no intellectual save C. S. Lewis affected the thinking of evangelicals more profoundly; perhaps no leader of the period save Billy Graham left a deeper stamp on the movement as a whole. Together the Schaeffers gave currency to the idea of intentional Christian community, prodded evangelicals out of their cultural ghetto, inspired an army of evangelicals to become serious scholars, encouraged women who chose roles as mothers and homemakers, mentored the leaders of the New Christian Right, and solidified popular evangelical opposition to abortion.<sup>2</sup>

In a similar vein, Harold O. J. Brown sums up the influence and impact of Francis Schaeffer by stating the following:

There is no other important Christian thinker of our era who has tackled as many fundamental intellectual, philosophical, and theological issues as Schaeffer did. But he did this not in an effort to construct a comprehensive philosophy of history like Oswald Spengler (*The Decline of the West*) or Arnold Toynbee (*A Study of History*). Even when dealing with the big issues that were his specialty, Schaeffer treated them not as theoretical problems to be fitted into a comprehensive world view, but as questions that individual persons needed to answer in order to find meaning in their lives.

There are not many Christian thinkers who have dealt with as many of the great issues of theology and philosophy as Schaeffer did, and no one else has so revealed their relevance to us. Schaeffer treated them as vital to the understanding of our own life and its meaning, rather than as abstractions reserved for the advanced seminar. Schaeffer was unusual among deep thinkers

in his desire to have ordinary people understand the great issues of philosophy and theology and their implications for ordinary living.<sup>3</sup>

In addition, we may provide further justification for our investigation of Francis Schaeffer by noting his significance and impact in three important areas: the personal, theological, and social.<sup>4</sup> In terms of the personal, Schaeffer's *initial* impact was not made institutionally, that is, through academic, educational institutions, or even through the publishing industry. Rather, his greatest influence was made more indirectly, through his own personal contact with individuals whom he came to know and whose lives he changed. His influence, in other words, was not being part of the evangelical establishment, but instead being quite independent of it. For Schaeffer, *personal* evangelism and discipleship were no cliché. It was through his life and ministry at L'Abri in Switzerland, far removed from America, that he and his wife, Edith, touched the lives of countless numbers of individuals—many of whom would later become key evangelical leaders. Certainly, for those of us who aspire to influence men and women for the gospel, it would be wise for us to learn lessons from the life of such a man and to discover afresh the importance of the personal touch in our interaction with people.<sup>5</sup>

Theologically, we may note Schaeffer's significance by the fact that he was instrumental in calling evangelicals to once again take seriously key truths that were tending to be de-emphasized or even being denied. In particular, Schaeffer challenged evangelicalism to re-assert its commitment to the concept of truth, or as he stated it—"true truth"—in light of a growing trend in academic theology, the

church, and the general culture towards a denial of truth and a full-orbed pluralism. That is why he championed, literally to his death-bed, the need to affirm without equivocation the full authority and inerrancy of Scripture as well as such crucial issues as: the historicity of Genesis 1-11, the doctrine of creation, the centrality of the doctrine of God, and the exclusivity of Jesus Christ as the way, the truth, and the life.<sup>6</sup> It is also why he stood so strongly against the theology of neo-orthodoxy<sup>7</sup> that was beginning to be embraced by some evangelicals because he believed that if it were accepted it would undercut the truth and veracity of the gospel. Probably today more than any other day we need to think through the theological challenges that Schaeffer left us with. Was he right? And if so, are there lessons today that we may learn from him as we attempt to stand for the truth of the gospel?

Socially, Schaeffer is also an important figure for our consideration. In the 1970s when evangelicals were doing little on the social front, he almost single-handedly challenged millions of evangelicals to take an active role in shaping their society and its values in addition to giving them a theological warrant for doing so.<sup>8</sup> As Brown observes, "the 1973 decision of the United States Supreme Court mandating abortion on demand, *Roe v. Wade* was a kind of spark in the powderkeg for Schaeffer."<sup>9</sup> For a long time, Schaeffer had been warning people that the worldview of the post-Christian west was heading to a de-valuation of human beings, and thus for him, the *Roe v. Wade* decision was a decisive call to action. In 1979, he along with C. Everett Koop and Franky Schaeffer produced the film series *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* that was

instrumental in mobilizing sleepy evangelicals to action, and challenging them to get involved in the political arena. It is not an exaggeration to say that the rise of Crisis Pregnancy Centers, the Christian Action Council, and even the Moral Majority, were directly linked to the influence of Francis Schaeffer. What were his reasons for social action? Were they valid? And what may we learn from him as we seek to be obedient to our Lord in our day?

But there is one last reason why we need to study the life and thought of Francis Schaeffer and it is this: the mixed reaction to him from evangelical scholars provides a window by which we may view an ever increasingly divided evangelicalism. Lane Dennis, in commenting on various critics of Schaeffer's thought who have called it everything from "sophomoric bombast," "simplistic," and "atrophied" to a "puerile concatenation of unsupported judgments," notes that "one doesn't usually hear these kind of adjectives in polite or scholarly conversation; apparently Schaeffer has touched a raw nerve."<sup>10</sup> Interestingly, Dennis observes that this kind of reaction seems to come mostly from academicians within evangelical colleges, rather than from evangelical scholars of secular schools.<sup>11</sup> Why? Why the negative reaction from certain quarters of evangelicalism, especially from the academics?

Some answer this question by stating that Schaeffer was not a real "scholar" and that is the reason for some of the negative reaction. However, for a variety of reasons this answer will not do.<sup>12</sup> Rather, it seems that Michael Hamilton is more on track when he argues that the diverse reactions to Schaeffer, both negatively and positively, reflect a major seismic divide within evangelicalism. Schaeffer represents, in the words of Hamilton, "the rougher

edge” of evangelicalism in contrast to Billy Graham and others who represent a “smoother edge.” The “smoother edge” is the part of evangelicalism that represents within evangelicalism the “moderate middle”—a middle that attempts to defuse controversy and wish the best for everyone, who seem to be willing to cooperate with anyone who will let them preach the gospel.<sup>13</sup>

On the other hand, Schaeffer represents the side of evangelicalism that is willing to work with others for common social causes as cobelligerents but not when it comes to the proclamation of the gospel. It is a side that is truth driven, so much so that it recognizes that seemingly “minor” shifts of doctrine are significant and thus must be taken seriously. It is a side that calls for a “loving *confrontation*” in matters of truth and life; otherwise compromise to the gospel will take place. It is a side of evangelicalism that this author is convinced we need to identify with today. That is why, in a time in which evangelicalism finds itself divided over so many issues, including some major doctrinal ones, it is wise to reflect on the life and thought of Francis Schaeffer—a servant of the Lord who stood firm for the gospel in his generation so that we may better learn how to do so in *our* generation.<sup>14</sup>

How do I propose to look at the life and thought of Schaeffer? First, we will begin with a brief chronology of his life to remind us, or in some cases, to introduce us to his life, context, and ministry. Second, we will highlight four lessons we can learn from Schaeffer’s thought, broadly considered. Finally, we will think through two lessons we can learn from his life and ministry.

## **A Brief Chronology of the Life of Francis Schaeffer<sup>15</sup>**

### ***Early Years***

- Francis Schaeffer was born on January 30, 1912, in Germantown, Pennsylvania. He was the only child of working-class parents of German ancestry. Schaeffer’s parents gave lip service to Christianity, but he did not consider himself raised in a Christian home.

- On his own, he attended a liberal Presbyterian Church. However, by his own confession he did not find any satisfying answers to the basic questions of life from liberal Christianity. As a result, he became an agnostic during his high school years. During his latter high school years he began to read philosophy in order to discover answers to life’s basic questions. Out of curiosity he also read the Bible. In 1930, after six months of reading Scripture, beginning with Genesis, he became a Christian. He was convinced that the Bible was true and that it provided the only adequate answers to the basic philosophical questions of life.

- After his conversion, he left trade school to complete college preparation classes at night. Although he had done poorly in school up to this point in time, his grades markedly improved. Against his father’s wishes, he began studies in 1931 at Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia. He graduated *magna cum laude* in 1935. He was selected the “outstanding Christian” in his class.

- The historic and theological context of this period of time was the fundamentalist-modernist controversies. By the early 1930s Schaeffer’s own denomination, the Northern Presbyterian Church, was being torn apart, both in the schools and in the churches. Interestingly, on one occasion in 1932, a sponsored youth speaker spoke on

why the Bible is not God's Word and why Jesus is not the Son of God. During the discussion time that ensued, Schaeffer, as a young Christian, rose to defend historic Christianity as best he could. But to his surprise there was one other person who stood and gave a very articulate defense from the Scripture as well as utilizing arguments from the works of J. Gresham Machen. Her name was Edith Seville. On July 26, 1935, Francis and Edith were married.

### *Seminary Years*

- In the fall of 1935, Francis Schaeffer entered Westminster Theological Seminary. Westminster had been founded in 1929 by J. Gresham Machen and other leading Presbyterian scholars who sought to provide a conservative alternative to theological liberalism. During his time at Westminster, Schaeffer was greatly influenced by the work of Machen, Cornelius Van Til, and Allan MacRae of Biblical Theological Seminary. Interestingly, Schaeffer saw himself as following through on the presuppositional apologetic program of Van Til, but sadly, in later years, there was a rift between the two men, particularly from Van Til's side.
- In 1936, the Northern Presbyterian Church defrocked Machen for his conservative stand. This led to conservatives breaking from the denomination, including Schaeffer. Unfortunately, due to some conflict within the conservative groups at Westminster in 1937 a new seminary was formed, Faith Theological Seminary in Wilmington, Delaware, under the leadership of Allan MacRae. Schaeffer moved to Faith to complete his studies and graduated from Faith in 1938. Schaeffer would later look back at this time in his life and regret some of the bickering and in-

fighting that had occurred among the conservatives. He would later call for the need of a "loving confrontation" that would simultaneously stand for truth and a visible love.

### *Pastoring Years*

- From 1938-1948, Schaeffer pastored various Presbyterian churches in Grove City and Chester, Pennsylvania, as well as St. Louis, Missouri. It was during their time in St. Louis that he and Edith began an organization called "Children for Christ"—an outreach ministry to children that eventually spread to other churches and denominations.
- In 1947, Schaeffer was sent by the Independent Board for Presbyterian Foreign Missions and the Foreign Relations Department of the American Council of Christian Churches to evaluate the spiritual needs of youth and the church's confrontation with theological liberalism in post-war Europe. As a result of his three months in Europe, Schaeffer sensed that God was calling his family to minister in Europe.

### *The Move to Europe*

- In 1948 the Schaeffers moved to Lausanne, Switzerland to be missionaries to Europe. By this time, the Schaeffers had three daughters, Priscilla, Susan, and Deborah. Their son, Franky, was born in 1952.
- As they came to Europe they first established "Children for Christ," as a missionary outreach to children. Schaeffer also continued to warn about the dangers of theological liberalism, as well as the subtle threat of neo-orthodoxy. In 1949, the Schaeffers moved to the mountain village of Champéry, Switzerland.
- In 1951, Schaeffer experienced a major

spiritual crisis in his life for at least two reasons. First, he did not see the reality of the gospel at work in the lives of those who fought for historic Christianity and this concerned him. Second, he acknowledged that in his own life his experience of the Lord was not as vibrant as it once had been. This crisis caused him to re-think everything—even the truthfulness of Christianity. From this experience, Schaeffer came to the firm conclusion that there were good and sufficient reasons to know that the God of the Bible does indeed exist and that Christianity is true. He also came to a better understanding of the finished work of Christ and the work of the Holy Spirit in the lives of believers. It was from this experience that his book, *True Spirituality*, was later born. More than that, it was out of this crisis that L'Abri was born. Schaeffer always said that without this time of struggle to find reality in the Christian life, L'Abri would never have come to exist.

- In 1955, through a series of miraculous circumstances, the Schaeffers moved into Chalet les Mélèzes in Huémoz, Switzerland. They not only received the necessary funds to purchase the Chalet, but were granted visas to stay in Switzerland after being told by the Swiss government that they had to leave the country permanently.

### *L'Abri* (“The Shelter”)

- L'Abri Fellowship was officially born in 1955. It began with friends of Priscilla coming to the Schaeffer home from the university and asking questions about Christianity, truth, and the issues of life. L'Abri operated on four basic principles: (1) They would not ask for money, but would make their needs known to God; (2) They would not recruit staff but

depend on God to send the right people; (3) They would only plan short-term so as to depend on God's guidance; and (4) They would not publicize themselves but trust God to send them people in need.

- At first, meetings and services were held in the Schaeffer's home. But then it moved to an abandoned Protestant church. By word of mouth, the news spread to university students that there was a place in the Swiss Alps where one could get honest answers to life's deepest questions. In short order, students were coming to L'Abri every weekend. They developed a pattern of meals, walks, talks, and a Sunday church service all geared toward providing an atmosphere that would stimulate conversation about philosophical and religious ideas.

- The key emphasis of L'Abri was on honest answers to honest questions in the context of a hospitable environment and observable love. In the early days there was no thought of books, films, and audiotapes. In fact, in the case of audiotapes, this only came about reluctantly by a microphone being hidden amongst some flowers and the conversations of the evening then taped. It was only when Schaeffer realized that the tapes could be used to reach others that he allowed for the tape program to begin. Eventually people came to study and work at L'Abri. Already by 1957, 25 people were coming every weekend.

- L'Abri expanded beyond Switzerland. In 1958, it began in England. Today, L'Abri's are found all over the world in such places as Australia, Holland, India, South Korea, and Sweden, as well as in the USA in Massachusetts and Minnesota.<sup>16</sup>

- By 1960, L'Abri had grown to such an extent that it attracted the attention of *Time*

magazine. Tapes were now being distributed worldwide and Schaeffer was getting invitations to speak in Europe and North America. These were difficult times at L'Abri as well. With more and more students coming, money and food was short.

- In 1965, Schaeffer traveled back to North America and held lectures in Boston. He then went to Wheaton College and gave lectures that later became the basis for his book, *The God Who is There*. At this time, the students greatly appreciated him, but the academic community was much slower in accepting him. At Wheaton, for example, he spoke on issues that most in evangelical circles had never heard of or were not allowed to discuss such as the films of Ingmar Bergman and Federico Fellini and the writings of Albert Camus, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Martin Heidegger.

- During the next ten years, the Schaeffers became one of the most well-known families in evangelicalism. Francis published numerous books and booklets, most of which came out of lectures he had been giving since the founding of L'Abri, and Edith also published a number of books dealing with marriage, the family, theology, and the L'Abri story.<sup>17</sup>

### ***The 1970s***

- In 1974, Schaeffer spoke at the International Conference on World Evangelization in Lausanne, Switzerland where he strongly emphasized the importance of biblical inerrancy. Later, in 1977, he helped found the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy.

- It was also during the '70s that he began to speak out against abortion due to the *Roe v. Wade* U.S. Supreme Court decision. In 1977 he began a 22 city seminar and speaking tour for the film series "How Should We Then Live?" He also

began work on the film series "Whatever Happened to the Human Race?" with C. Everett Koop and Franky Schaeffer, which resulted in a speaking tour in 1979.

- In his works, Schaeffer's critique of culture and his defense of historic Christianity led him to also speak up on such issues as: doctrinal and life purity, abortion, euthanasia, ecology, war and peace, and civil rights. Schaeffer spoke long and hard against the church standing for the status quo, especially in terms of her adoption of the American philosophy of life that had permeated society since the '50s—living merely for "personal peace and affluence." He called for a new generation of Christians who would truly be "revolutionary" in their stand for truth in both doctrine and life.

### ***The 1980s***

- In the 1980s, Schaeffer became increasingly alienated from evangelical academics and politically liberal evangelicals due to his perceived shift to "conservatism." This was especially due to his publication of *A Christian Manifesto* (1981) that not only praised the rise of the Moral Majority, but also called for Christians to stand against abortion and, if necessary, to practice civil disobedience. Interestingly, Schaeffer himself did not see any shift in his thinking from the '70s. Rather, he saw his work in the '80s as the logical extension of a commitment to the practice of truth and an outworking of the lordship of Christ over every area of life, whether that be in the womb, in the church, or the university classroom.

- In 1984, while still battling cancer that he had been diagnosed with in 1978, Schaeffer, literally on his death-bed, did a thirteen-city tour visiting ten Christian colleges in connection with his last book,

*The Great Evangelical Disaster*. In this last tour, he passionately spoke on behalf of the gospel, warning and pleading with the evangelical church not to compromise biblical authority in both doctrine and practice, even naming names of those whom he believed had done so. He called for a new generation of Christians to take a stand for truth, to be in his words—“radicals for Christ.”

- On May 15, 1984, a month after the tour was complete he died in Rochester, Minnesota.

### **Lessons to Learn from the Thought of Francis Schaeffer**

#### *Ideas Have Consequences*

One of the great legacies of Francis Schaeffer’s work was to show us that “ideas have consequences.”<sup>18</sup> Even though he was not entirely correct in some of his analysis, Schaeffer was exactly right that western society has seen a “line of despair”—a slow process by which ideas trickle down from philosophy to art, music, the general culture and, finally, theology.<sup>19</sup> The cultural mess we live in did not come from nowhere, rather it has a long history. As Schaeffer reminded us over and over again, there is a flow to history as ideas work themselves out—both for good or ill.

In addition, Schaeffer taught us that to understand our present time, we must also grasp the flow of intellectual history that precedes us, and the effects it has and will have on us as people eventually act on their beliefs. In fact, Schaeffer warned us, if we do not think through this intellectual history, we will not only misunderstand our own times, but we will also have nothing constructive to say to our present age. We will inevitably be like the proverbial frog in the pot of water that

is oblivious to the fact that the water is being slowly heated and that if he does not jump out of the pot immediately then certain destruction will result.

For Christian leaders, pastors, and teachers, this lesson is of utmost importance. If we are to remain faithful to our Lord and to his people; if we are to have something worthwhile to say to our generation; if we are to be those who truly understand their times and speak to the pressing issues of the day, then it will require nothing less than a profound understanding of the day and age in which we are called to serve and minister, as well as a wholehearted devotion to the Lord and his Word. In this regard, Schaeffer often loved to quote the famous statement by Martin Luther,

If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ, however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved, and to be steady on all the battlefield besides, is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.<sup>20</sup>

This was not theoretical for Francis Schaeffer. For him, this was a matter of life and death. We must grasp, he warned, the importance of “ideas” in order rightly to understand our times. For, if we do not, we will be swept away by the “spirit of our age” without our even being aware of what has happened to us.

#### *The Battle of the Day: The Idea of Truth*

What, then, for Schaeffer was the key “idea” to be grasped today? From an analysis of intellectual history, what should the church learn in order to remain



faithful to the Lord today? What is *our* battle? For Schaeffer, the answer is beyond dispute; our battle today is a battle for the very idea and concept of truth. Schaeffer states:

The present chasm between the generations has been brought about almost entirely by a change in the concept of truth.

Wherever you look today the new concept holds the field. The consensus about us is almost monolithic, whether you review the arts, literature or simply read the newspapers and magazines such as *Time*, *Life*, *Newsweek*, *The Listener* or *The Observer*.... It is like suffocating in a particularly bad London fog. And just as fog cannot be kept out by walls or doors, so this consensus comes in around us, until the room we live in is no longer unpolluted, and yet we hardly realize what has happened.

The tragedy of our situation today is that men and women are being fundamentally affected by the new way of looking at truth, and yet they have never even analyzed the drift which has taken place. Young people from Christian homes are brought up in the old framework of truth. Then they are subjected to the modern framework. In time they become confused because they do not understand the alternatives with which they are being presented. Confusion becomes bewilderment, and before long they are overwhelmed. This is unhappily true not only of young people, but of many pastors, Christian educators, evangelists and missionaries as well.

*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.*<sup>21</sup>

In the current literature, whether that is philosophical, scientific, literary, or theological, the term “postmodernism” is often used to describe what Schaeffer was referring to. Even though Schaeffer himself never used the term, he certainly

anticipated and described it long before its popular use.<sup>22</sup> Schaeffer had a knack of doing this. He often could “see” where ideas were going because he took seriously the maxim, “ideas have consequences.”

In today’s use, “postmodernism” has come to mean a mindset that is tightly linked with a denial of truth in any objective, universal sense. It is often contrasted with “modernism,” which reflects much of the Enlightenment spirit—a spirit, interestingly enough, that borrowed much from Christianity. Like Christianity, it too believed that truth was objective and universal and that reason could gain truth by research and investigation. However, unlike Christianity, it sought to discover truth apart from dependence upon God and his spoken Word. Instead of following the Christian motto of “faith seeking understanding” and underscoring the priority of divine revelation, modernism sought to follow the agenda of “I understand in order to believe.” In this sense, then, modernism sought to subsume all truth claims, whether philosophical or religious, under the “authority” of human reason independent of God’s Word.

Postmodernism, on the other hand, is really modernism that has traveled its road to its logical end, and is thus much more epistemologically self-conscious of its starting points and results.<sup>23</sup> In this sense, postmodernism takes seriously the Enlightenment project centered in the autonomous self. But then, ironically, it rightly concludes that if the Enlightenment view is correct, truth could never be universal. Why? The simple reason is that finite human beings and communities are too historically situated and sociologically conditioned to ever yield a “God’s eye point of view,” i.e., an objective, universal, unbiased viewpoint. Truth, in the end,

cannot be what modernism hoped it was; rather it must be perspectival, provisional, and ultimately, what the community most values, i.e., pragmatic. Of course, if postmodernism is true, in contrast to the beliefs of modernism, then any claims of individuals or communities to know “the truth” is necessarily wrong—an interesting irony indeed. Postmodernism, at its heart, is a distrust of anyone who says, “That’s the way it is” or “This is the truth,” and as such, it tends to a full-blown pluralism, relativism, and skepticism. As D. A. Carson reminds us, today “the only absolute creed is the creed of pluralism”<sup>24</sup>—i.e., everyone’s viewpoint is welcome whether it pertains to philosophical, moral, or religious matters.

Even though Francis Schaeffer never used the word “postmodernism,” he certainly warned us of the idea and its consequences. In fact, it was this “idea” that he labored continually in his books and lectures for us to understand and grasp. At the heart of so many issues that confront the church, he argued, is an epistemological shift that has taken place in western thought and culture, a shift that we now call postmodernism, a shift away from truth, or what he called “true truth.”<sup>25</sup> And, he also warned us, if we do not understand this shift and take it seriously and confront it, we will *not* be fighting the battle of our day as good soldiers of Jesus Christ. In the end, our teaching, preaching, apologetics, and evangelism will fall on deaf ears since it will not address adequately our generation. Our generation will either hear the presentation of the gospel as a relic of a by-gone era or in the categories of a postmodern society, thus relativizing the gospel.<sup>26</sup> Ultimately what is at stake today, maintained Schaeffer, is an entire *worldview*

battle. No longer is the battle for the gospel over this or that point, but over the whole structure and framework—a battle of life and death proportions and consequences.

It is this last observation that needs to be learned afresh from Francis Schaeffer. Schaeffer’s great concern was for the proclamation of the gospel and the building up of the church. He wanted to speak faithfully to his generation in such a way that the gospel was heard for what it really was. That is why he labored to help people understand intellectual history—not for curiosity’s sake—but for the purpose of better understanding the times. In all the legitimate discussion and debate over the accuracy of Schaeffer’s interpretation of such people as Thomas Aquinas, Georg Hegel, Søren Kierkegaard, various artists and musicians, and even Karl Barth, most acknowledge that Schaeffer’s overall analysis is correct—an analysis that has been too often forgotten in both its theory and practical implications. Regardless of all of the details, Schaeffer was right to stress the incredible epistemological shifts that had taken place in western society, shifts that have incredible *practical* consequences. Let us briefly highlight three of those practical implications that Schaeffer warned us about that are of particular importance for the church today.

#### *The Shift to Experience*

With the loss of truth there is an increasing shift to *experience*, but an experience that is often devoid of content and truth. In his analysis of western thought, Schaeffer argued that modern man increasingly began to view the world in a naturalistic way.<sup>27</sup> In science, there was a shift from viewing the uniformity of natu-

ral causes in a controlled system by which God continually sustains that system and can even intervene in it if he so chooses, to a closed system that shuts God out of the system. In philosophy, especially in the west, there was a growing Enlightenment push towards “rationalism,”<sup>28</sup> that is, a mindset that sought to employ human reason in such a way that it increasingly acted independently of divine revelation in order to yield a unified world and life view. But, as Schaeffer claimed, these shifts eventually led to a dichotomous view of reality, which he called “the lower and upper story,” as evidenced in such dialectics as the “nature-freedom” and “phenomena-noumena” divide of Immanuel Kant.<sup>29</sup>

The problem with these dialectical views of reality, Schaeffer contended, is that they leave us with a terribly divided view of the world. Human reason acting independently of divine revelation has no way of reconciling how in the “lower story” (i.e., the realm of “nature”) this naturalistic, determined, cause and effect impersonal world can give a rational grounding to the “upper story” (i.e., the realm of “freedom”) in which we try to find meaning, values, purpose, and freedom. So what are human beings to do? Do they live consistently with the implications of what their reason leads them to conclude in the “lower story”—that they are determined and meaningless? Well, some try to. But, as Schaeffer observed, what Scripture teaches is that because this view of reality is wrong and all people are made in God’s image, it is nigh impossible to live with such a view. Instead, what people do in practice is give up the possibility of uniting these dichotomous realms, that is, they give up the hope of truth in the sense of a unified worldview, and then make the move towards irratio-

ality. They argue for meaning, values, purpose, and freedom, but apart from a rational base. They live by “faith” but a faith that has little or no content and rational grounding. They place in the “upper story,” as Schaeffer emphasized repeatedly, a focus on *experience*, but an experience that is open to anything; an experience that can be as diverse as drugs and sex in the 1960s to new age spirituality in the 1980-90s.<sup>30</sup> Thus, for Schaeffer, the best way to characterize “post-modern” people (or as he stated it, “modern, modern”) is that they are those who live with the dichotomy between the “lower and upper story.” For him, this was not just a clever statement; it was the heart of the matter.

So what practical implications does this have for us today? One massive implication it has, Schaeffer claimed, is in our evangelism. In our proclamation of the gospel, we must constantly remember that we are preaching to people who live with the dichotomy. And unless we anticipate how they will hear what we are saying, we run the risk of not communicating to them properly and even making converts who “believe” in Jesus as just another “upper story” experience divorced from truth, rationality, and reality. In fact, Schaeffer’s critique of evangelicalism, both theologically and practically, was centered on this exact point.

On the one hand, he was concerned that evangelicals in their evangelism were downplaying doctrine and content for experience. In calling people to saving faith we must make clear that gospel realities communicate “true truth,” confronting people with the “God who is really there” and that faith is not a blind leap, but rooted and grounded in truth. Experience is important, and Schaeffer

strongly emphasized that fact, but it must not be divorced from truth.<sup>31</sup> On the other hand, in the area of academic theology, he was concerned that evangelicals were adopting too much of the theology of neo-orthodoxy. He believed that it was a mistake of gigantic proportions to argue a position, such as Karl Barth's, that allowed for the possibility of mistakes in Scripture that did not negatively affect our faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. He viewed Barth's theology as another example of the tendency of contemporary thought to dichotomize reality and to divorce "faith" and theology from rational grounding and verifiable history.<sup>32</sup>

In these points, Francis Schaeffer is correct. Evangelicalism, especially today, must not lose the issue of truth, content, and doctrine. Experience is important. But experience must always be grounded in the truth of God's Word. Given the tendency of our generation to appeal to experience, we must be careful that we are not conformed to our age. It matters greatly what we believe and, ultimately, whom you believe in. Not all "faith" or "faiths" are equal. This leads me to a second practical implication that Schaeffer warned us about.

### *The Challenge of Religious Pluralism*

With the loss of truth, there will be an increasing emphasis on religious pluralism and a downplaying of the exclusivity of the gospel. When Schaeffer spoke of religious pluralism, he was not referring to the empirical observation that there are many religions in the world and that even in the west there is an increasing growth of religions where Christianity once was predominant. Rather, he was referring to the mindset that did not allow that any one religion was true or better than

another. He saw this as a practical consequence of a denial of truth.

For those of us living at the beginning of the twenty-first century, we are confronted by this attitude everywhere. When The Southern Baptist Convention sends out prayer letters and says that Jewish and Hindu people need to be evangelized because they are lost, we know the kind of reaction that we receive from those outside the church, and sadly even from those who identify with the church. What is interesting about Schaeffer at this point was that he saw this coming way back in the 1960s.<sup>33</sup> He saw that a major implication of the loss of truth is that a full-orbed pluralism will be put in its place. And part of our calling in our generation is to stand at this point, without compromise, proclaiming an exclusive Christ in an inclusive, pluralistic age.

### *The De-valuation of Human Life*

With the loss of truth there is a third practical implication, namely the de-valuation of human life. I have already made mention of this above and I will allude to it below, but it is important to point out that Schaeffer's prediction that the post-Christian west would begin to devalue life was a prediction rooted in his analysis of the shift of ideas that was taking place in the west away from a Christian understanding of the world to a modernist and eventual postmodernist understanding of reality. Schaeffer had been warning people for years that the worldview of the west was moving in the direction of interpreting reality solely in terms of an impersonal, closed system. Of course the entailment of this was not only that chemistry and physics were interpreted within a "closed system" but so also were the humanities—psychology, sociology, lit-

erature, and even theology. In this, there was a massive turn to the impersonal, which, Schaeffer predicted, would lead to a de-valuation of human beings.

Of course, Schaeffer's prediction was exactly right. Ethical issues and debates common today—abortion, infanticide, euthanasia, cloning—are all evidences of the fact that the value of human life is up for grabs. That is why Schaeffer took the stand he did on the social front. It was not a stand divorced from his theology; rather it was precisely because he saw that ideas have consequences and that truth demands action.

As I have stated, Schaeffer's constant emphasis that "ideas have consequences" is one of his great legacies that we neglect to our peril. Moreover, we need to learn from Schaeffer to remain faithful to the Lord today; to proclaim the gospel in such a way that effectively communicates to people; and to prepare Christians to understand their world and live in it in such a way that they are not molded by it. As he taught us, these issues are not merely academic; they are a matter of life and death.

### *The Importance of Worldview Thinking*

Francis Schaeffer not only taught us that "ideas have consequences," he also reminded us that the crucial "ideas" at issue are ultimately worldview debates. Although, this is not a new observation, it is one that, until recently, has often been neglected.<sup>34</sup> Given the tremendous shifts that have taken place in society, it is important to realize that we are engaged in a battle not over merely this or that point of Christian truth, but over entire competing worldview structures.

Schaeffer spoke of these worldview dif-

ferences in terms of presuppositional differences.<sup>35</sup> He argued that in the west at the beginning of the twentieth century, everyone—Christian and non-Christian alike—were working from basically the same presuppositions, influenced strongly by a Christian view of reality. Even though it could be argued that the non-Christian had no right to act on these presuppositions, given his rejection of the Christian worldview, still it could be said that there was a commonality in thinking. But eventually as people began to act upon their presuppositions in a more consistent fashion, which led them further away from a Christian view of the world, many Christians did not notice what had happened. And so, as Schaeffer comments, "The flood-waters of secular thought and liberal theology overwhelmed the Church because the leaders did not understand the importance of combating a false set of presuppositions. They largely fought the battle on the wrong ground and so, instead of being ahead in both defense and communication, they lagged woefully behind. This was a real weakness which it is hard, even today, to rectify among evangelicals."<sup>36</sup>

Furthermore, this lack of worldview thinking, Schaeffer argued, is also due to the kind of education we received, whether it is Christian or secular. He astutely observed that in our education we often tend towards specialization without seeing the interrelationships between disciplines and thus the "big picture," i.e., worldview. As such, we are in danger of not seeing how various ideas relate to one another and thus the consequences of those ideas. He states,

Today we have a weakness in our educational process in failing to understand the natural associations

between the disciplines. We tend to study all our disciplines in unrelated parallel lines. This tends to be true in both Christian and secular education. This is one of the reasons why evangelical Christians have been taken by surprise at the tremendous shift that has come in our generation. We have studied our exegesis as exegesis, our theology as theology, our philosophy as philosophy; we study something about art as art; we study music as music, without understanding that these are things of man, and the things of man are never unrelated parallel lines.<sup>37</sup>

This is an important lesson to learn, especially in our day. In many ways, we are back with Paul at Athens preaching to an audience and context that is pluralistic, pagan, and foreign to Christianity in terms of worldview structures (Acts 17). That is why Francis Schaeffer repeatedly argued, appealing to texts such as Acts 17, that we must do “pre-evangelism,” which he closely associated with apologetics. He argued that there were two purposes of apologetics. First, to defend the Christian worldview from attacks against it and to give people reasons why we believe Christianity to be true. But there is also a second purpose of apologetics that is closely associated with evangelism and it is this: we are to communicate the gospel to *our* generation in terms they can understand. Thus, part of our task in evangelism and apologetics is to present the gospel for what it really is, within its own worldview structure, so that people will hear correctly the claims and demands of the gospel upon them.<sup>38</sup>

How this practically worked itself out in the life of Schaeffer was that in his evangelism and presentation of Christianity he would not begin with “accept Christ as Savior”; instead he would begin where Scripture begins, starting with the doc-

trine of God, establishing the worldview structures of Christianity grounded in the doctrine of creation, revelation, and the historic fall, and then and only then move to redemption, pointing people to the Lord Jesus Christ, who alone is their only hope.<sup>39</sup> Why? Because, like Paul at Athens, he knew that unless he first developed a biblical frame of reference, i.e., worldview, the proclamation of the gospel would not make sense and his hearers would not hear the gospel for what it truly is, in its own categories and on its own terms. Schaeffer, like Paul, was very concerned that the gospel is not wrongly dismissed or re-interpreted into another alien worldview framework, for that only leads to a distortion of the gospel message. And especially in our pluralistic, postmodern, inclusive age, in order to present Jesus Christ as not just another god or savior, but the exclusive Lord, Savior, and Judge, Schaeffer saw that it was imperative to build a biblical-theological framework, rooted in the story line of Scripture. That is, he saw that it was crucial to think in a worldview manner, rooted and grounded in the God who is there.

In truth, what Schaeffer called us to and role modeled in his own life, was the doing of theology. In the broadest sense, the task of theology is to apply all of Scripture to the issues of life. It is to work from within the categories, structures, and teaching of Scripture, following the story line of Scripture, and apply it to the world. It is to live from within the worldview of Scripture and to set that biblical-theological framework over against all other worldviews. In short, it is to learn afresh how “to think God’s thoughts after him” and “to bring every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”<sup>40</sup> This was Schaeffer’s

fer's strength and this is another crucial lesson that we need to learn from him.

In fact, I am convinced that it was because he constantly thought at the worldview level that helps explain why he was so adamant that evangelicals must not compromise certain points of doctrine. It was because he realized that Christianity was a worldview and that its parts "hung together" as a whole, that he was very concerned when evangelical scholars would chip away at some of these seemingly "insignificant" points. Thus, for example, he was very concerned that Adam was viewed as a historic figure and the Fall as a space-time event, and that the early chapters of Genesis were not de-historicized. Why? Because he rightly saw that unless we took the Bible on its own terms; unless we maintained these crucial starting points that were the building blocks for the rest of the story, then the worldview of historic Christianity would not only collapse, but, in the end, Christianity itself would become nothing more than another "upper story" thing divorced from rational grounding, truth, and the God who is really there.<sup>41</sup> At stake, in other words, was not just one point of doctrine, but the entire worldview claim; indeed, the gospel.

If we are to learn from Schaeffer at this point, our thinking, teaching, preaching, and living must be much more worldview-ish. Our battle today is over entire worldview structures. Thus, in our teaching and preaching we must work harder at showing people how the pieces of Scripture "hang together" as a coherent whole, and how those pieces lead to worldview formation. But even more: in our evangelism, in speaking to a culture that increasingly operates with alien worldviews and knows little of Christian-

ity, we must learn afresh to communicate the gospel within its own worldview structure, beginning with the God who is there.

### *The Centrality of the Doctrine of God*

Francis Schaeffer was truly a God-centered man. This was not only true in his personal devotion and life; it was also true in terms of his thought.<sup>42</sup> It is instructive that the very titles of his books—e.g., *The God Who Is There; He Is There and He Is Not Silent*—illustrate the fact that for Schaeffer, all the answers of life, meaning, morality, significance, and values are rooted and grounded in the personal-infinite, Triune God of Scripture.

Interestingly, there is a logical progression in these lessons; they are not random or haphazard. What has happened to western culture? For Schaeffer, modern man has turned away from the God of Scripture. In so doing, certain consequences have resulted from these alien worldviews that we see around us, living in our postmodern culture. What, then, is the solution to our problem? Where shall we turn to overcome the dichotomies in our intellectual life, the alienation in our personal lives, and the impersonalism of our society? The Triune God of Scripture. For it is only in him, the personal-infinite God who is the creator, sustainer, and providential Lord, the God who speaks, that we can find the answers to the questions of life. In him alone are intellectual answers because he is the source and standard of truth; but also in him alone is forgiveness, healing, justification, and redemption. For Schaeffer, God is not merely the transcendental necessity for meaning, truth, and values. He is also our portion. He is the God who is there—who

can be known, loved, and adored.

It is at this point, that we must learn from Schaeffer. First, we must learn afresh how central the doctrine of God is to the Christian worldview. We must especially learn this living in a day of religious pluralism in which the word “god” has basically become meaningless and contentless. We must have courage to stand and proclaim only one God and no other. We must have courage even in the evangelical world in which current debate over the doctrine of God is raging, to say that not all conceptions of God are equal.<sup>43</sup> It is only the God of Scripture, represented by historic Christianity, who is there. But secondly we must learn afresh that our doctrine of God must not be merely theoretical. This God must also be our portion. He must be the one who captures our thinking and our lives. In our teaching, preaching, and living, the God of Scripture must be our passion and delight.

### ***The Necessity of Biblical Authority and Inerrancy***

Probably few evangelicals have spoken more passionately about inerrancy, biblical authority, and the doctrine of inspiration than Francis Schaeffer. Not only was he instrumental in forming the International Council on Biblical Inerrancy, he also taught, preached, and wrote about how much biblical authority was a “watershed” issue. He had no time for evangelicals who only gave lip service to biblical authority while at the same time redefined what inerrancy historically meant for the church, obfuscating it in hermeneutical issues, or undercutting the very claims of Scripture regarding itself. Now the interesting question to ask is: Why? Why was Schaeffer so concerned about biblical authority?

The answer should not surprise us. He was so concerned because the doctrine of Scripture was so basic to the Christian worldview and the God of Scripture. For Schaeffer, it is the God of the Bible—the personal-infinite, Triune God—who is the transcendental necessity for meaning, significance, values, and truth. We come to know this God not only because he is there, but because he has spoken to us—he is not silent. And because God is as Scripture presents him to be—the creator, sustainer, and Lord of his universe—there is no intellectual problem affirming that God is perfectly able to reveal himself to us and to guarantee that what the human authors of Scripture freely write is precisely what he intended to have written. Furthermore, this seems to be the claim of Scripture regarding itself.<sup>44</sup> So exegetically, theologically, and philosophically, biblical authority makes sense. It is intellectually credible, part and parcel of the entire worldview structure. And it is theologically necessary if we are to have truth and to justify theological doctrines.<sup>45</sup> Without a high view of Scripture, we deny what Scripture says about itself and undercut the foundation by which we may do theology and answer the basic questions of life.<sup>46</sup>

That is why Schaeffer grew increasingly alarmed at evangelicals who were departing from or undercutting a high view of Scripture. His last book, literally written on his death bed, sought to warn the evangelical church against compromising on biblical authority for some of the reasons just stated. He writes,

Evangelicals today are facing a watershed concerning the nature of biblical inspiration and authority.... Within evangelicalism there is a growing number who are modifying their views on the inerrancy of



the Bible so that the full authority of Scripture is completely undercut. But it is happening in very subtle ways. Like the snow lying side-by-side on the ridge, the new views on biblical authority often seem at first glance not to be so very far from what evangelicals, until just recently, have always believed. But also, like the snow lying side-by-side on the ridge, the new views when followed consistently end up a thousand miles apart.

What may seem like a minor difference at first, in the end makes all the difference in the world. It makes all the difference, as we might expect, in things pertaining to theology, doctrine and spiritual matters, but it also makes all the difference in things pertaining to the daily Christian life and how we as Christians are to relate to the world around us. In other words, *compromising the full authority of Scripture eventually affects what it means to be a Christian theologically and how we live in the full spectrum of human life.*<sup>47</sup>

It should not surprise us that various evangelicals have not accepted this either-or presentation of Schaeffer. For example, Scott Burson and Jerry Walls think that he has overstated his case. They ask whether inerrancy really is the watershed issue for evangelicals and they respond with a negative answer.<sup>48</sup> They argue that God was less concerned with the exact wording of Scripture and more concerned with the “essential reliability of his overall message.”<sup>49</sup> They have problems with two premises of Schaeffer’s argument: (1) That the Bible contains exactly what God desires, down to the very words; (2) That God can precisely control what human authors write without taking away their freedom, because these premises seem to imply an implicit determinism associated with a compatibilistic view of human freedom.<sup>50</sup> Lurking behind this criticism is an implicit adoption of a libertarian view of human freedom which entails a more lim-

ited understanding of God’s sovereign control over the world.<sup>51</sup>

What is important about this observation is that Burson and Walls rightly note that Schaeffer’s high view of Scripture and his defense of inerrancy requires a certain conception of the sovereignty of God and his relation to his creatures, particularly the authors of Scripture. Schaeffer, as one who affirmed a strong view of divine sovereignty and the rule and reign of God in this world, would not be surprised. Arguing from a Reformational theology, he would have acknowledged that the doctrine of inerrancy is intimately tied to our view of God. As we have noted above in commenting on the God-centeredness of Schaeffer’s thought, the doctrine of God was the pivotal starting point in his understanding and defense of Christianity. For him, not just any god would do. It was only the personal-infinite, (i.e., sovereign) Triune God of Scripture who alone is the foundation for truth and knowledge, and who alone, if he so chooses, can reveal himself in such a way that is wholly reliable, true, and trustworthy.<sup>52</sup> However, what would have disturbed Schaeffer is the weakening of the infinite, or sovereign, nature of God that is now occurring in some quarters of evangelicalism.<sup>53</sup> He would have been disturbed by this trend because he would have whole-heartedly agreed with the astute observation of J. I. Packer that:

The customary apologetic for biblical authority operates on too narrow a front. As we have seen, faith in the God of the Reformation theology is the necessary presupposition of faith in Scripture as “God’s Word written,” and without this faith *sola Scriptura* as the God-taught principle of authority more or less loses its meaning ... we must never lose sight of the fact that our doctrine of God

is decisive for our concept of Scripture, and that in our controversy with a great deal of modern theology it is here, rather than in relation to the phenomena of Scripture, that the decisive battle must be joined.<sup>54</sup>

No doubt, much more could be said and must be said about Schaeffer's exposition and defense of the doctrine of inerrancy.<sup>55</sup> But suffice it to say that for him biblical authority was a watershed issue of gigantic proportions. It was an issue intimately linked to his overall defense of the Christian worldview. He believed that, without it, the Christian worldview would begin to unravel, beginning with the doctrine of God.<sup>56</sup> In this, I am convinced, he is right. We must learn afresh today that the doctrine of inerrancy is no mere option for evangelicals. It is part and parcel of what Christianity is and to tone it down is to undercut the whole.

### **Lessons to Learn from the Life of Francis Schaeffer**

At the end of his life, Schaeffer wrote the following words:

What really matters? What is it that matters so much in my life and in your life that it sets priorities for everything we do? Our Lord Jesus was asked essentially this same question and his reply was: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments." (Matthew 22:37-40). Here is what really matters—to love the Lord our God, to love his Son, and to know him personally as our Savior. And if we love him, to do the things that please him; simultaneously to show forth his character of love and holiness in our lives; to be faithful to his truth; to walk day by day with the living Christ; to live

a life of prayer.

And the other half of what really matters is to love our neighbor as ourselves. The two go together; they cannot be separated.... And if we love our neighbor as Christ would have us love our neighbor, we will certainly want to share the gospel with our neighbor; and beyond this we will want to show forth the law of God in all our relationships with our neighbor.

But it does not stop here. Evangelism is primary, but it is not the end of our work and indeed cannot be separated from the rest of the Christian life. We must acknowledge and then act upon the fact that if Christ is our Savior, he is also our Lord in *all* of life. He is our Lord not just in religious things and not just in cultural things such as the arts and music, but in our intellectual lives, and in business, and in our relation to society, and in the attitude toward the moral breakdown of our culture.... Making Christ Lord in our lives means taking a stand in very direct and practical ways against the world spirit of our age as it rolls along claiming to be autonomous, crushing all that we cherish in its path.<sup>57</sup>

In this quote we glimpse something of the life of Francis Schaeffer and lessons we may learn from that life. No doubt it is true that Schaeffer was not a perfect individual; no one is. Yet, in his life we see a person of integrity; a man who attempted to live and act upon what he believed and taught. In particular, he sought to love the Lord and his neighbor, and in so doing to bring his life constantly, in both thought and action, under the Lordship of Jesus Christ. Let us look at each of these areas in turn.

### ***Loving the Lord Your God***

As stated above, Schaeffer was a God-centered man. This was not only true in terms of his thought, but also his life. Whether you read his works or listen to

his tapes, a deep devotion for the Lord is clearly evident. Here is an individual who does not merely talk about God, but one who knows him deeply. Even the beginning of L'Abri was born in a spiritual crisis to know God in a deeper way. Schaeffer recounts in *True Spirituality* how he himself faced a spiritual crisis in 1951-52, and out of that crisis the birth of L'Abri took place. He discovered during this time what it meant to rely upon the finished work of Christ in our *present* lives and in moment-to-moment dependence upon the Spirit of God in prayer. And this was not mere rhetoric for him. L'Abri itself was rooted and grounded in prayer; a visible testimony to the existence, power, and grace of God.<sup>58</sup>

We also see in Schaeffer a man who sought to exhibit simultaneously the holiness of God and the love of God, albeit in an imperfect way. He was a man of courage and compassion, both in terms of his thought and life. He spoke much about the need for "loving confrontation" and he demonstrated it in his life. For example, Harold O. J. Brown recounts at least three areas in which Schaeffer took a stand, when it was not fashionable to do so, largely due to his desire to honor the Lord with all his heart, soul, mind, and strength.

First, there was his stand against the theology of Karl Barth. As noted above, Schaeffer was converted and received his theological training in the 1930s. At that time evangelical theology was almost nonexistent for a variety of reasons largely stemming from the fundamentalist-modernist controversies of that era. However, after World War II, evangelicalism enjoyed a rebirth under such scholars as F. F. Bruce and Carl F. H. Henry, as well as under the evangelistic ministry of Billy Graham.

Brown recounts that Schaeffer could have been a part of this movement and attained celebrity status; however he detected flaws and compromise that were serious enough to undermine evangelicalism as a movement. What did he see? He saw the growing influence of neo-orthodoxy on evangelical theology. What was appealing about Barth was that he too, like evangelicals, was criticizing many liberal assumptions held in the academic community. As such, some evangelicals were drawn to the orthodox elements in Barth's theology, while they were slow to observe the negative points. However, what Schaeffer noticed was not only that Barth's influence in Europe was beginning to decrease, but also that Barth's theology, if adopted, would undermine evangelical theology.<sup>59</sup>

Where did Barth go wrong? Schaeffer argued that Barth had an improper view of biblical authority. He allowed for the theoretical possibility of mistakes in Scripture, thus undermining the foundations for evangelical theology. Barth's critique against liberalism was helpful, but his foundations for the faith were shaky, and this precisely is what Schaeffer pointed out. What Schaeffer saw, probably more clearly than anyone else, was that Barth's theology was not the one to adopt.<sup>60</sup>

Brown summarizes it this way:

There is no doubt that Barth was antiliberal, and that he affirmed the central doctrines of the Christian faith. However, his failure to assert Biblical infallibility and the historicity of the Gospel accounts meant that his affirmations rested on his own charismatic authority rather than on that of Scripture. Because of his failure to shore up the foundations of Biblical authority which had been sapped by a generation of destructive criticism, Barth was not able to establish a second generation of

Protestant theologians in the faith that he himself honored; his greatest influence remains among evangelicals and other conservatives who already know why they believe. There is no doubt that Barth's affirmations *are* encouraging, but his foundations are inadequate, and it would be dangerous to take him as a theological guide. It is remarkable that Schaeffer recognized this three decades ago while some evangelical leaders today are "discovering" Barth as the answer to modern disbelief.<sup>61</sup>

Second, and probably even more disturbing to some evangelicals than his stand against Barth, was Schaeffer's failure to embrace wholeheartedly the evangelistic methods of Billy Graham. It was not that Schaeffer was against evangelism, nor was it due to Graham's lack of commitment to biblical authority. Rather, it was a twofold concern. First, Schaeffer was alarmed that Graham too quickly worked with and did not sufficiently distinguish between those who held to historic Christianity versus liberalism or Roman Catholic theology.<sup>62</sup> Second, he was concerned that Graham's evangelism did not touch the whole person and as such, it tended to appeal solely to an emotional decision—an "upper story" experience—that will, in the end, only produce pseudo-converts.<sup>63</sup> As Brown notes, Schaeffer's criticism of Graham's approach was not offered to a wide public, but it soon became known. He was criticized by some leaders in the evangelical movement, such as Carl Henry and Harold Lindsell, and written off by others as being too separatistic.<sup>64</sup> Yet, Schaeffer realized something that too many failed to see. What good is "success" in evangelism if it does not produce true converts? Evangelism, especially in this era, given the massive shifts that have

taken place in society, must call for "solid foundations *as well as* good feelings."<sup>65</sup> As Brown astutely observes, evangelicalism as a movement only gained a sense of strength and stability in those early years because "many of Graham's converts later went through the school of Schaeffer's disciplined thinking."<sup>66</sup>

Third, there was his courageous stand for the rights of the unborn. It is important to realize that Schaeffer's social activism was not independent of his defense of truth and the gospel. As already stated above, the *Roe v. Wade* decision of the U.S. Supreme Court in 1973 was a powder keg for Schaeffer. It was alarming evidence that the ideas of the Enlightenment were beginning to have practical consequences in how human beings viewed each other. Schaeffer had been predicting for quite some time that, with the loss of a Christian view of reality in the west, one of the massive implications would be the loss of respect for human life. And that is precisely what *Roe v. Wade* symbolized for Schaeffer. And so when he, along with precious few others, took this issue to the streets, he did so out of a profound sense of love for God and his Word, as well as love for his neighbor. Truth demanded action.

But initially not all evangelicals, especially those in leadership positions, appreciated Schaeffer's stand. As Brown notes, with the publication of *A Christian Manifesto*, he for the first time was branded a political conservative, which brought attacks from a growing number of politically liberal evangelicals.<sup>67</sup> Brown states:

Schaeffer's increasingly outspoken commitment to specific conservative causes in the last two years of his life troubled some evangelicals who disagreed with him, because they recognized his influence among the

general Christian public. In addition, it embarrassed others, who generally agreed with him, because they wished to avoid controversy and not to endanger their own acceptance among the general public. Consequently Schaeffer found himself once again, at the end of his life, in the position he had occupied in the 1960s, before his name became a household word—a voice crying in the wilderness.<sup>68</sup>

Here again, we may learn from Schaeffer. Even though it was costly to him, he stood for the cause of truth and life. His practical, social action was not divorced from his beliefs and his love for the Lord; instead, it flowed from them. In a day when it is so easy to compromise in the midst of pressure, to bend when the going gets tough, Schaeffer is a contemporary role model, like those ancients in the past, who was willing to love God with his whole self, to exhibit his character in the toughness of life, and to be faithful to God's truth.

### *Loving Your Neighbor as Yourself*

As Schaeffer stated in the quote above, the love of God and the love of neighbor are intimately intertwined and “if we love our neighbor as Christ would have us love our neighbor, we will certainly want to share the gospel with our neighbor; and beyond this we will want to show forth the law of God in all our relationships with our neighbor.”<sup>69</sup> Of course, no person living this side of the consummation will ever achieve this ideal, however in Francis (and Edith) Schaeffer we see a person who at least sought to model for us something of how it should be done. We see this especially in three areas.

First, Schaeffer demonstrates his love for his neighbor in attempting to give honest answers to honest questions. In his booklet, *Two Contents, Two Realities*,

Schaeffer contends that there are four things that are absolutely necessary if Christians are going to meet the challenges of our day: (1) Sound doctrine; (2) Honest answers to honest questions; (3) True spirituality; and (4) The beauty of human relationships. In his discussion of (1) and (2) he stresses the need to make no compromises over sound doctrine, while simultaneously spending time with people and attempting to answer their questions. He deplors the attitude of some in the church who give the impression that we are not to ask any questions, just believe. This, he says, is always wrong. It is wrong because it does not view human beings as whole people who need both intellectual and spiritual answers.<sup>70</sup> It is also wrong, especially in an age that does not believe in truth, to say that we have the truth and then not take the time to answer real and difficult questions. But, of course, this not only takes a lot of time and effort, it also takes compassion to meet people where they are. Answering questions is hard work. Schaeffer states it this way:

Christianity demands that we have enough compassion to learn the questions of our generation. The trouble with too many of us is that we want to be able to answer these questions instantly, as though we could take a funnel, put it in one ear and pour in the facts, and then go out and regurgitate them and win all the discussions. It cannot be. Answering questions is hard work. Can you answer all the questions? No, but you must try. Begin to listen with compassion. Ask what this man's questions really are and try to answer. And if you don't know the answer, try to go someplace or read and study to find the answer.

Not everybody is called to answer the questions of the intellectual, but when you go down to the shipyard worker you have a similar task.... I

tell you they have the same questions as the university man. They just do not articulate them the same way.

Answers are not salvation.... And there must be the work of the Holy Spirit. Nonetheless, what I am talking about is our responsibility to have enough compassion to pray and do the hard work which is necessary to answer the honest questions.<sup>71</sup>

These were not just empty words to Schaeffer; they reflected his life.<sup>72</sup> For countless numbers who came to L'Abri, Schaeffer sought to put into practice what he taught. Constantly one of the charges I hear from students at seminary is that professors, and even pastors, have no time for them. They have honest questions that require time and attention, but often we are too busy to help. But, as Schaeffer reminded us, we are called to love our neighbor. For Christian leaders, pastors, and teachers, certainly one way that this must show itself is in time spent, care shown, and honest answers given to real people who, in a postmodern age, deserve nothing less.

A second way that the Schaeffers demonstrated their love for others was through hospitality. At L'Abri they opened up their home to individuals, which was certainly not an easy thing to do. As Schaeffer later reflected on this he stated that "in about the first three years of L'Abri all our wedding presents were wiped out. Our sheets were torn. Holes were burned in our rugs. Indeed, once a whole curtain almost burned up from somebody smoking in our living room.... Drugs came to our place. People vomited in our rooms."<sup>73</sup> Now this is not to say that everyone must do what the Schaeffers did. However, in their life we see two individuals who took seriously the command to love both God and neighbor.

Story after story at L'Abri is centered in how this visible love was so instrumental in bringing people to Christ.<sup>74</sup> Evangelism must not be divorced from how we treat the whole person, in our words and in our actions.

Third, Schaeffer's life sought to exhibit a wonderful balance between truth and love. He stood fast for the gospel, but in so doing he sought to love and understand in person-to-person relationships the people to whom he was ministering. Brown, comparing Francis Schaeffer to Athanasius (another role model from the past who knew what it was to stand for the truth), relates how Schaeffer sought to achieve the balance between truth and love. He states:

Like Athanasius, Schaeffer took stands—especially in his last years—which some would call intemperate and inflexible. We do not really know how Athanasius dealt with people on a personal level; it is possible that he was as severe with individuals as he was with their theology. But in Schaeffer's case, we know that the rigor of his convictions was always tempered with love and understanding in person-to-person relationships as well as in public debate. He invariably treated those with whom he deeply disagreed with consideration and love. Francis Schaeffer not only held the line for Biblical orthodoxy in his generation as Athanasius had done. What is perhaps even more important, Schaeffer showed the next generation not merely *that* they will need to take stands, but *where* to take them and *how* to do so, in Paul's words, "speaking the truth in love" (Ephesians 4:15). He has shown us that standing "*contra mundum*" is an essential part of being "*pro Christo*."<sup>75</sup>

Here is another lesson that we must learn, especially for those of us who serve as leaders in the church. Every generation

must stand for the truth, but we must do so in love. Today, we hear much about love at the expense of taking hard and uncompromising stands for truth. In a day that desperately needs to hear the truth, we cannot waver at this point. However, we must not go to the other extreme either; both truth and love are necessary. And Francis Schaeffer is a helpful role model at this point. A man of conviction, rooted and grounded in God's Word; a man who knew firsthand what "loving confrontation" was all about; a man who sought to love the Lord his God and his neighbor as himself, and to exhibit, in thought and action, the Lordship of Jesus Christ in all of life. May we learn likewise.

In the end, Francis Schaeffer was a fallen, imperfect man, saved by the grace of God. He, like us all, made many mistakes. But he was a unique individual, gifted by God for his generation. He often said that God did not have to use someone with extraordinary gifts, instead God can use a dead stick of wood if he wants as he did in the hand of Moses. In a very memorable sermon he stated it this way:

Though we are limited and weak in talent, physical energy, and psychological strength, we are not less than a stick of wood. But as the rod of Moses had to become the rod of God, so that which is *me* must become the *me* of God. Then I can become useful in God's hands. The Scripture emphasizes that much can come from little if the little is truly consecrated to God. There are no little people and no big people in the true spiritual sense, but only consecrated and unconsecrated people. The problem for each of us is applying the truth to ourselves.... Those who think of themselves as little people in little places, if committed to Christ and living under His Lordship in the whole of life, may, by God's grace, change the flow of our

generation. And as we get on a bit in our lives, knowing how weak we are, if we look back and see we have been somewhat used of God, then we should be the rod "surprised by joy."<sup>76</sup>

From the thought and life of Francis Schaeffer there is much to ponder and learn. It does not honor him simply to parrot back everything he has said; he would not have wanted this. Instead, what we are to learn from him is how to minister more effectively in *our* time as he did in his—with mind and heart firmly rooted and grounded in Scripture; passionate for the gospel; willing to tackle the issues of our day in faithfulness to our great God. After all, no higher tribute could be given to a man who sought in his thought and life, above all, to live under the Lordship of Jesus Christ, for the glory of God alone.

## ENDNOTES

<sup>1</sup>Unless otherwise noted, all references to the writings of Francis Schaeffer will be taken from *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, 5 vols., 2d ed. (Wheaton: Crossway, 1985).

<sup>2</sup>Michael S. Hamilton, "The Dissatisfaction of Francis Schaeffer," *Christianity Today*, 3 March 1997, 22.

<sup>3</sup>Harold O. J. Brown, "Standing Against the World," in *Francis Schaeffer: Portraits of the Man and His Work*, ed. Lane T. Dennis (Westchester: Crossway, 1986) 15-16.

<sup>4</sup>These three areas of Schaeffer's impact are taken from Brown, 19-25.

<sup>5</sup>For more on the personal influence of Francis Schaeffer in the lives of various individuals see the chapters in Part 2 of *Francis Schaeffer: Portraits*, 129-205. Also in this regard see some of the personal correspondence between Schaeffer and various people on a variety of issues in

Lane T. Dennis, ed., *Letters of Francis A. Schaeffer* (Westchester: Crossway, 1985).

<sup>6</sup>Francis Schaeffer's last work, *The Great Evangelical Disaster* (Westchester: Crossway, 1984) was published just months before he died of cancer. In this work he sought to warn and plead with the evangelical community not to compromise biblical authority and the exclusivity of the gospel. He even named various names of those whom he believed had compromised at these points, while at the same time calling for a new generation of Christians to take a stand as "radicals for truth" in our time. *The Great Evangelical Disaster* was re-published in *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer*, 4:301-411.

<sup>7</sup>"Neo-orthodoxy" is a theological movement beginning in the early 1920s and continuing to this day, even though its primary influence in the larger theological world was from the 1920s to the 1970s. It is associated with a number of theologians such as Rudolf Bultmann, Emil Brunner, Reinhold Niebuhr, and Paul Tillich, but it is most famously associated with the theology of Swiss theologian Karl Barth. For more on neo-orthodoxy see, David F. Ford, ed., *The Modern Theologians*, 2d ed. (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) 21-102; C. A. Baxter, "Neo-Orthodoxy," in *New Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Sinclair Ferguson et al. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988) 456-457.

<sup>8</sup>On this subject especially see *How Should We Then Live?; Whatever Happened to the Human Race?; and A*

*Christian Manifesto* in *The Complete Works*, vol. 5.

<sup>9</sup>Brown, 23.

<sup>10</sup>Lane T. Dennis, "Schaeffer and His Critics," in *Francis A. Schaeffer: Portraits*, 102. The reviews that Dennis mentions are those of Ronald A. Wells, "Francis Schaeffer's Jeremiad: A Review Article," *The Reformed Journal*, May 1982, 16-20, and Stephen Board, "The Rise of Francis Schaeffer," *Eternity*, June 1977, 41.

<sup>11</sup>Dennis, "Schaeffer and His Critics," 227, n. 5.

<sup>12</sup>*Ibid.*, 102-26. Dennis' excellent discussion of this whole issue is very helpful as he addresses the whole issue of whether Schaeffer was a "scholar" and whether this is the real reason for the negative reaction to his thought.

<sup>13</sup>See Hamilton, 30.

<sup>14</sup>It is well known that evangelicalism is a divided movement on a number of important doctrinal issues. For a discussion of some of these doctrinal divisions from a variety of viewpoints see the following: "Evangelical Megashift," *Christianity Today*, 19 February 1990, 12-17; Kenneth S. Kantzer and Carl F. H. Henry, eds., *Evangelical Affirmations* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990); Millard Erickson, *The Evangelical Left* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1997); Roger Olson, "The Future of Evangelical Theology," *Christianity Today*, 9 February 1998, 40-42; Elmer M. Colyer, ed., *Evangelical Theology in Transition* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1999); Stanley Grenz, *Renewing the Center* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000); John D. Woodbridge et

al., *This We Believe* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2000).

<sup>15</sup>For further resources that outline the life of Francis Schaeffer in much more detail, see David Porter, "Francis Schaeffer," in *Great Leaders of the Christian Church*, ed. John D. Woodbridge (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988) 362-366; Colin Duriez, "Francis Schaeffer" in *Handbook of Evangelical Theologians*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1993) 245-259; and Dennis, ed., *Francis A. Schaeffer: Portraits*, 207-211. Also see the life story of the Schaeffers as told by Edith Schaeffer in *L'Abri*, 2d ed. (Wheaton: Crossway, 1992) and *The Tapestry* (Waco: Word, 1981).

<sup>16</sup>For more information on the ministry of L'Abri Fellowship today, see [www.labri.org](http://www.labri.org).

<sup>17</sup>For a complete list of books, tapes, and videos by Francis and Edith Schaeffer see [www.labri.org](http://www.labri.org).

<sup>18</sup>This theme runs throughout Schaeffer's books, but especially see *The God Who Is There; Escape from Reason; He Is There and He Is Not Silent; How Should We Then Live?; and Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* in *The Complete Works*, vols. 1 and 5.

<sup>19</sup>There has been a lot of debate over the accuracy of Schaeffer's analysis of western thought, art, music, and culture. Even though it is no doubt true that at some points he has painted a broad and over-generalized picture, it has also been acknowledged that the "big picture" he sketched has been proven to be basically correct. On more of this see the essays by Ronald Nash, "The Life of the Mind and the Way



of Life," and Lane Dennis, "Schaeffer and His Critics," in *Francis A. Schaeffer: Portraits*, 53-69 and 101-126 respectively. Also see some of the helpful comments by Duriez, 252-259.

<sup>20</sup>Cited in *The God Who Is There*, 1:11.

<sup>21</sup>*The God Who Is There*, 1:5-6.

<sup>22</sup>In Schaeffer's writings, he often distinguished between "modern science and philosophy" and "modern modern science and philosophy." In this latter expression, he anticipates what is now called "postmodernism." On this especially see *Escape from Reason*, 1:225-236.

<sup>23</sup>For more on postmodernism, both popular and more sophisticated, see the following works: Gene E. Veith, Jr., *Postmodern Times* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1994); David Dockery, ed., *The Challenge of Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1995); Stanley J. Grenz, *A Primer on Postmodernism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996); D. A. Carson, *The Gagging of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996); Kevin Vanhoozer, *Is There a Meaning in This Text?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1998); and Millard Erickson, *Truth or Consequences: The Promise and Perils of Postmodernism* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 2001) and *The Postmodern World* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2002).

<sup>24</sup>Carson, 19.

<sup>25</sup>Schaeffer's use of the expression "true truth" illustrates the fact that he was concerned that the term "truth" no longer meant what it used to mean. So, in order to communicate effectively to a generation that does not believe in truth, he coined this expression to communi-

cate an objective, universal, reality-corresponding view of truth.

<sup>26</sup>For some of these same concerns see Carson, 13-54; 491-514.

<sup>27</sup>For this analysis especially see *Escape from Reason*, 1:205-270.

<sup>28</sup>The term "rationalism" can mean many things to many people. To some it is a term that refers to a school of epistemology known as "Continental Rationalism" in contrast to other schools such as "British Empiricism" or Immanuel Kant's "Transcendental Idealism." To others, it simply means a person who overemphasizes the use of reason. However, for Schaeffer he is using the term to refer to "any philosophy or system of thought that begins with man alone, in order to try to find a unified meaning to life" (*The God Who Is There*, 1:200). In other words, "rationalism" refers to a mindset, an approach to philosophy that views human beings as the final authority in matters of truth and reality, which he then sets over against Christianity that views God and his Word as the final authority for matters of truth and life.

<sup>29</sup>Schaeffer's analysis of western thought in terms of a progressive development of a number of dialectical tensions is very similar to that of Herman Dooyeweerd, *A Critique of Theoretical Thought*, 4 vols. (Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1953-58) and highly indebted to his former professor, Cornelius Van Til, found in such works as: *A Christian Theory of Knowledge* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969); and *A Survey of Christian Epistemology*

(Philadelphia: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1969).

<sup>30</sup>See *The God Who Is There*, 1:13-90. For Schaeffer, this analysis was at the heart of his apologetics. Time and time again he sought to help people become more epistemologically self-conscious about the implications of their presuppositions, attempting to demonstrate that all worldviews, other than Christianity, are ultimately internally inconsistent and thus nigh impossible to live out, practically speaking. For more on the nature and methodology of Schaeffer's apologetics see *The God Who Is There*, 1:129-181.

<sup>31</sup>This theme is found throughout Schaeffer's writings as well as in his taped lectures. See especially his taped lecture entitled, "Basic Problems We Face" Part 1 and 2. All of Schaeffer's tapes and those of L'Abri Fellowship may be purchased through Sound Word Associates, P.O. Box 2036, Chesterton, IN 46304 or at [www.soundword.com](http://www.soundword.com).

<sup>32</sup>There has been a lot of discussion over whether Schaeffer interpreted and understood Barth correctly. No doubt, Barth is a lot more nuanced than Schaeffer mentioned in his books, and much more could and needs to be said about Barth's theology. However, Schaeffer's basic analysis, I would contend, is correct, especially at the points he was emphasizing. For a more in-depth treatment of Barth's theology, following a similar assessment, see Cornelius Van Til, *Christianity and Barthianism* (Nutley: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977).

<sup>33</sup>See the taped lectures of Schaeffer

entitled, "Basic Problems We Face"; "Exclusive Christ in an Inclusive Age"; "Relativism in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century"; and "Vatican Council II." In the "Vatican II" lectures, Schaeffer perceptively analyzes the shifts that were occurring in Roman Catholic theology towards a more "inclusive" understanding of salvation at the beginning of Vatican Council II in 1962.

<sup>34</sup>The term "worldview" today is now common, thanks to the influence of people like Francis Schaeffer. For a popular work that helps us view ideas in terms of worldview structures see James Sire, *The Universe Next Door*, 3d ed. (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1997).

<sup>35</sup>In apologetics, the word "presupposition" is not always used in the same way. This is important to remember and sadly it is too often forgotten in debates over methodological differences between various approaches to apologetics within evangelical apologetics. Schaeffer, for example, used the term to refer to "a belief or theory which is accepted before the next step in logic is developed" (*The God Who Is There*, 1:201). In this sense, "presuppositions" serve as hypotheses that need to be independently verified by such things as logic, historical evidence, pragmatic fit, etc. Gordon Clark in *Three Types of Religious Philosophy* (Nutley: Craig Press, 1973) 121-123, used the term to refer to "axioms" of a person's system of thought, which are unprovable because they are dogmatically posited as a first principle for which there is nothing more basic by

which to demonstrate it. Cornelius Van Til, on the other hand, used the term to refer to the ultimate criteria of one's world-view that are not beyond rational proof, i.e., they are transcendentals that must be argued for and defended. As Van Til states, "A truly transcendental argument takes any fact of experience which it wishes to investigate, and tries to determine what the *presupposition* of such a fact must be, in order to make it what it is" (*Survey of Christian Epistemology*, 10; cf. 201). For a helpful discussion on how the term presupposition is used in Christian apologetics see Greg L. Bahnsen, *Van Til's Apologetic* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1998) 461-697.

<sup>36</sup>*The God Who Is There*, 1:7.

<sup>37</sup>*Escape from Reason*, 1:211.

<sup>38</sup>Schaeffer spoke of this in terms of "pre-evangelism." Christian apologetics, he argued, had two purposes: (1) to defend the gospel; and (2) to communicate the gospel in a way that any given generation can understand. In using the term "pre-evangelism" he was referring to (2). Schaeffer was concerned that in our presentation of the gospel, especially living in an increasingly biblically illiterate and post-Christian culture, that people had knowledge of the gospel before they had faith, hence the need for *pre*-evangelism. As he stated, "the invitation to act [that is, believe in Christ] comes only after an adequate base of knowledge has been given.... Knowledge precedes faith. This is crucial in understanding the Bible. *To say (as a Christian should) that only*

*that faith which believes God on the basis of knowledge is true faith, is to say something which causes an explosion in the twentieth-century world"* (*The God Who Is There*, 1:153-154).

<sup>39</sup>For an example of this see *The God Who Is There*, 1:93-160; *Two Contents and Two Realities*, 3:407-422, and various tapes where he discusses this such as: "Basic Problems We Face" and "Before the Beginning."

<sup>40</sup>The expression "to think God's thoughts after him" was a strong emphasis in the thought of Cornelius Van Til, Schaeffer's apologetics teacher at Westminster Theological Seminary. For a helpful discussion of this phrase in Van Til with application to Schaeffer's thought as well, see Bahnsen, 220-260.

<sup>41</sup>This argument is especially developed in *Genesis in Space and Time*, 2:1-114 and *The Great Evangelical Disaster*, 4:301-411.

<sup>42</sup>For the centrality of the doctrine of God in the life of Schaeffer see such works as: *True Spirituality*, 3:193-378; *Two Contents, Two Realities*, 3:407-422; and *The Great Evangelical Disaster*, 4:301-411.

<sup>43</sup>One cannot help think of the raging debate within evangelical theology over open theism and the attempt by open theists to redefine and revise the doctrine of God. On this see the various books by open theists such as: Clark Pinnock, et al., *The Openness of God* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1994); John Sanders, *The God Who Risks* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998); and Gregory A. Boyd, *God of the Possible* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2000). In

terms of response and able critique see Bruce A. Ware, *God's Lesser Glory* (Wheaton: Crossway, 2000); and John M. Frame, *No Other God* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 2001).

<sup>44</sup>On what Scripture claims for itself see Wayne Grudem, "Scripture's Self-Attestation and the Problem of Formulating a Doctrine of Scripture," in *Scripture and Truth*, ed. D. A. Carson and John D. Woodbridge (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983) 19-59; John Frame, "Scripture Speaks for Itself" in *God's Inerrant Word*, ed. John W. Montgomery (Minneapolis: Bethany, 1974) 178-200; Sinclair Ferguson, "How Does the Bible Look at Itself?" in *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic*, ed. Harvie Conn (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988) 47-66.

<sup>45</sup>Schaeffer's argument at this point is for the epistemological necessity of inerrancy, i.e., without an inerrant text there is no way to justify theological doctrines. What does Schaeffer mean by this? Schaeffer's argument was *not* that if the Bible is wrong on one point, it cannot be trusted anywhere. Obviously that argument is false. Just because the Bible might be wrong at one point does not mean that it is not reliable in much of what it teaches at other points where it can be confirmed. Rather, what he did mean is that if Scripture is not inerrant in everything that it affirms, then how do we *know* any theological truth asserted in Scripture? A theological truth which is asserted in Scripture might be believed, it might even be true, but how will it be *known* if the Scripture contains errors in it? In the

end, Scripture will not be able to serve as our final authority unless it is trustworthy and reliable in all that it affirms.

<sup>46</sup>See *The Great Evangelical Disaster*, 4:329-330.

<sup>47</sup>*Ibid.*, 328-329.

<sup>48</sup>See Scott R. Burson and Jerry L. Walls, *C. S. Lewis and Francis Schaeffer* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1998) 114.

<sup>49</sup>*Ibid.*, 135-136.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*, 135.

<sup>51</sup>There has been a lot of discussion of late as to the entailments of a libertarian view of human freedom for one's conception of divine sovereignty, and thus the God-Scripture relationship. David Basinger and Randall Basinger in "Inerrancy, Dictation, and the Free Will Defense," *Evangelical Quarterly* 55 (1983) 177-180, spawned the discussion by arguing that one could not simultaneously hold to libertarianism and inerrancy, unless one wanted to appeal to a dictation theory of inspiration. Burson and Walls refer to the Basingers' argument positively and then try to place Schaeffer in the camp of libertarianism, thus arguing an inconsistency in Schaeffer's thought. In terms of the issue of whether Schaeffer was a libertarian, this is very difficult to assess. Schaeffer was not working with a precise definition of human freedom, especially as we have it in the philosophical and theological literature today. Rather, Schaeffer's concern was to emphasize the freedom and responsibility of human beings, in contrast to the determinism of people like B. F. Skinner, while at the

same time maintaining a strong sense of God's sovereign rule and reign over the world. How libertarians have taken their argument today, and especially how they have applied it to the doctrine of Scripture (cf. Basingers' argument), I am convinced Schaeffer would have rejected outright. For a more in-depth discussion of the divine sovereignty-human freedom relationship as applied to Scripture see my articles, "The Importance of the Nature of Divine Sovereignty for Our View of Scripture," *The Southern Baptist Journal of Theology* 4.2 (2000) 76-90, and "Divine Sovereignty-Omniscience, Inerrancy, and Open Theism: An Evaluation" *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* (forthcoming, June 2002).

<sup>52</sup>See *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*, 1:347.

<sup>53</sup>See note 51.

<sup>54</sup>J. I. Packer, "'Sola Scriptura' in History and Today," in *God's Inerrant Word*, 60.

<sup>55</sup>For some current works that defend a high view of Scripture see, for example, D. A. Carson and John Woodbridge, eds., *Scripture and Truth and Hermeneutics, Authority, and Canon* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1986); Norman Geisler, ed., *Inerrancy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1980); J. M. Boice, ed., *The Foundation of Biblical Authority* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978); Harvie M. Conn, ed., *Inerrancy and Hermeneutic*; Gordon Lewis and Bruce Demarest, eds., *Challenges to Inerrancy* (Chicago: Moody, 1984); Earl Radmacher and Robert Preus, eds., *Hermeneutics, Inerrancy and the Bible*

(Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984); Carl F. H. Henry, *God, Revelation, and Authority*, 6 vols. (Waco: Word, 1976-83).

<sup>56</sup>On this point, see Schaeffer's discussion in *The Great Evangelical Disaster*, 4:329-344.

<sup>57</sup>*Ibid.*, 4:321-322.

<sup>58</sup>For the story behind L'Abri and how it was birthed and maintained in prayer see Edith Schaeffer, *L'Abri*.

<sup>59</sup>This is not to say that some evangelicals did not criticize Barth's theology. But Schaeffer, along with Van Til, were very concerned that evangelical theology distinguish itself from Barth, even though Barth spoke many excellent points against liberalism. Both Van Til and Schaeffer were concerned about the whole package of Barth's thought, which they were convinced would undermine historic Christianity. On Van Til's strong reaction to Barth see *Christianity and Barthianism* (Nutley: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1977). Also see John Frame's incisive summary of Van Til's problem and rejection of Barth's theology, parallel to Schaeffer's reaction as well, in *Cornelius Van Til: An Analysis of His Thought* (Phillipsburg: Presbyterian and Reformed, 1995) 353-369.

<sup>60</sup>This is not to say that Schaeffer was the only one to criticize Barth at this point. I have already made mention of Van Til as another strong critic, and there were others as well.

<sup>61</sup>Brown, 20-21.

<sup>62</sup>See Iain H. Murray, *Evangelicalism Divided* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth Trust, 2000) 50 n. 5; 76-77. Also see where Schaeffer comments on the fear he sees within evangelicalism

of cooperating in the area of evangelism with those who are not evangelical in their theology in *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century*, 4:30-49; *The Great Evangelical Disaster*, 4:343; and *Letters of Francis Schaeffer*, 72.

<sup>63</sup>See Brown, 21-22. Much of Schaeffer's criticism of Graham at this point is not directly written down. We know of it from those who knew Schaeffer personally as well as hints of it in Schaeffer's writings. On this point see *Two Contents; Two Realities*, 3:407-422 and *The Great Evangelical Disaster*, 4:343.

<sup>64</sup>See Brown, 21-22.

<sup>65</sup>*Ibid.*, 21. Schaeffer states, "What is the use of evangelicalism seeming to get larger and larger if sufficient numbers of those under the name evangelical no longer hold to that which makes evangelicalism evangelical? If this continues, we are not faithful to what the Bible claims for itself, and we are not faithful to what Jesus Christ claims for the Scriptures. But also—let us not ever forget—if this continues, we and our children will not be ready for difficult days ahead" (*The Great Evangelical Disaster*, 4:343).

<sup>66</sup>*Ibid.*, 21-22.

<sup>67</sup>*Ibid.*, 24.

<sup>68</sup>*Ibid.*, 25.

<sup>69</sup>*The Great Evangelical Disaster*, 4:322.

<sup>70</sup>Schaeffer emphasized strongly that evangelism must deal with the whole person—the mind, will, emotions, heart, and soul. When asked on one occasion how he viewed himself, whether as a theologian, philosopher, or apologist, he responded that he was an evange-

list. But he did not view his evangelism as divorced from the great intellectual and cultural issues of life because human beings are whole beings. He states: "People often say, 'What are you?' and I sometimes have said, 'Well basically I am an evangelist.' But sometimes I do not think that people have understood that does not mean that I think of an evangelist in contrast to dealing with philosophic, intellectual, or cultural questions with care. I am not a professional, academic philosopher—that is not my calling, and I am glad that I have the calling that I have, and I am equally glad some other people have the other calling. But when I say that I am an evangelist, it is not that I am thinking that my philosophy, etc. is not valid—I think it is.... But what I am saying is that all the cultural, intellectual or philosophic material is not to be separated from leading people to Christ. I think my talking about metaphysics, morals, and epistemology to certain individuals is a part of my evangelism just as much as when I get to the moment to show them that they are morally guilty and to tell them that Christ died for them on the cross. I do not see or feel a dichotomy: *this* is my philosophy and *that* is my evangelism. The whole thing is evangelism to the people who are caught in the second lostness we spoke of—the second lostness being that they do not have answers to the questions of meaning, purpose, and so on.... To me there is a unity of all reality, and we can either say that every field of study is a part of evange-

lism... or we can say that there is no true evangelism that does not touch all of reality and all of life" (*The God Who Is There*, 1:185-187).

<sup>71</sup>*Two Contents, Two Realities*, 3:414.

<sup>72</sup>See *Letters of Francis A. Schaeffer* and Part 2 of *Francis A. Schaeffer: Portraits*, 131-205.

<sup>73</sup>Cited in Hamilton, 25.

<sup>74</sup>Once again I would refer the reader to Part 2 of *Francis Schaeffer: Portraits*, 131-205.

<sup>75</sup>Brown, 26.

<sup>76</sup>"No Little People, No Little Places," in *No Little People*, 3:8, 14.

Francis A. Schaeffer (1912–1984) authored more than twenty books, which have been translated into a score of languages and sold millions worldwide. He and his wife, Edith, founded L'Abri Fellowship international study and discipleship centers. Recognized internationally for his work in Christianity and culture, Schaeffer passed away in 1984 but his influence and legacy continue worldwide. Lane T. Dennis is president and publisher of Crossway Books and Good News Tracts. Dr. Dennis earned his BS in business from Northern Illinois University, an MDiv from McCormick Theological Seminary, and