



Francis Schaeffer 1912-1984

Francis August Schaeffer was an American Evangelical Christian theologian, philosopher, and Presbyterian pastor. He is most famous for his writings and his establishment of the L'Abri community in Switzerland.

Francis Schaeffer became one of the most influential Christian leaders of the twentieth century. He was born on January 30, 1912, in Germantown, Pennsylvania to humble-working parents. He graduated *cum laude* from Hampden-Sydney College in 1937 and Faith Theological Seminary in 1938. He married Edith, the daughter of missionary parents, who had been with the China Inland Mission, founded by Hudson Taylor. Young Francis pastored several small churches in America, and then spent most of his life in Europe, to which he had come as a missionary at the end of World War II. Quoting from The Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development, Francis Schaeffer was spoken of this way, "Never seeking 'fame' or 'a name.' God used him to help his church at a time when she faced, and still faces, the massive challenges brought about wherever western culture and 'worldview' have spread."

Francis and Edith Schaeffer were blessed with four children. Francis was deeply engaged in the lives of each child. He enjoyed teaching and sharing cultural and artistic history, philosophy, and the joys and sorrows of being fully human.

The Schaeffer family settled in Switzerland in the tiny village of Huemoz, where they began the L'Abri ministry (that is French for "the shelter"). The story of how God opened the way for them to move there and start their ministry is recorded in a book of that name. Serving as both a philosophy seminar and a spiritual community, L'Abri attracted thousands of young people, and was later expanded into Sweden, France, the Netherlands, the United Kingdom, and the United States.

In their ministry at L'Abri Francis and Edith Schaeffer wanted to demonstrate that there was a true outworking of trust and dependence on God in all circumstances – a demonstration that the unseen supernatural world really exists. They wanted to demonstrate that Christianity has true and genuine answers to the questions of the human heart. They committed themselves to prayer, asking that God would send those who were seeking to their ministry,

and that God would supply all their needs. Their prayers were answered in the lives of countless individuals who came and found answers for their lives.

Francis Schaeffer called for authentic Christianity and demonstrated the strength of Christian community. The Institute of Church Leadership put it this way, "The Schaeffers also wanted to show that Christianity is not 'dehumanizing' but makes us what we should be – 'whole' people in true 'community' with one another. The community life will never be perfect, but there can be real and substantial 'healing' – in our innermost being, in our relationships with one another, with the wider world, and with the environment. L'Abri and each local church/community of Christians should be like a 'pilot plant' which shows what life could be like when the primary relationship – that with our Maker – is restored on the basis of 'the finished work of Christ plus nothing.' Too often the church has ended up being nothing more than a conventional institution where religiosity, and not vibrant Christianity, is dominant. His was a clarion call to true reformation and genuine spirituality."

Perhaps, Francis Schaeffer is best known in America for his apologetic writings, including *A Christian Manifesto* and *How then Shall We Live*. *A Christian Manifesto* was intended as a Christian answer to *The Communist Manifesto of 1848*. In this book, Schaeffer called Christians to stand strong against the increasing influence of secular humanism. He argued that the decline of Western Civilization is due to society having become increasingly pluralistic, resulting in a shift away from a God centered society to a secular society where "man is the measure of all things." He called for Christians to take a stand against the evils of our day, including abortion.

How Then Shall We Live traces Western history from Ancient Rome until the late 20th century. Schaeffer's central premise was that if we base society on the Bible, it provides an absolute by which we can conduct our lives. When we base society on Humanism, all values are relative and we have no way to distinguish right from wrong except by utilitarianism. This book served as the basis for a series of ten films. Schaeffer narrated and appeared throughout the 1977 film series. *How Then Shall We Live* and the subsequent films were highly influential in the evangelical community.

Francis Schaeffer's work is carried on today in several ways. One of his daughters and sons-in-law has established The Francis A. Schaeffer Foundation in Gryon, Switzerland; it is likened to the original L'Abri Fellowship. In 1978, Schaeffer asked a group of Reformed Episcopal clergy to research his thoughts, which eventually resulted in "The Francis A. Schaeffer Institute of Church Leadership Development." Its purpose was to reach and train pastors and church leaders to focus on Christ-centered principles through its curriculum and forums. Thirdly, Schaeffer's books and several films are still reaching people in the plea for living out a Christian worldview.

The Institute of Church Leadership Development stated: "God greatly blessed this 'man and wife team,' and they have put many of us in their debt as they shared those blessings in a life of gracious Christian self-giving. May you go on to prove that in your experience too as you learn from these faithful servants of their risen Lord."