

# The Spiritual Integrity of Francis Schaeffer

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I have chosen to write about Francis Schaeffer's spiritual integrity and a few of the many places where that integrity led him in his life's work. It enables me to include the importance of his wife, Edith, and also to at least suggest something of the breadth of his contributions to church and world. First, by his "spiritual integrity" I certainly do not mean some sort of spiritual perfection. I mean his sense that God is really "there," true and present with us here and now in every area of our lives, making a difference. Christian faith must be personally "real," not only a mental acceptance of certain doctrines about God, salvation and his world. Many of us who knew him remarked that what he believed with firm confidence and followed with extraordinary commitment, he also experienced emotionally in great depth. He *felt* God's

truth—whether it was the wonder of God’s glory and grace for himself and others, the suffering of individual people or compassion for the lostness of the non-Christian world.

It was spiritual integrity which led him to creative listening, thinking and praying into many areas of brokenness in the mid and late twentieth century. He was intensely aware of failures in the church which had become destructive to Christian individuals and also to the attractiveness and persuasiveness of Christ to the world which so needed him.

I will try in this brief space to describe something of the scope of Francis Schaeffer’s thinking and its continuity into the work of L’Abri Fellowship which he and Edith had started in 1955, and is still going on with works now in nine countries. I thought that the best way to do this would be to look at what some of us in L’Abri have called “the five themes of L’Abri.” These themes are: (1) The Christian faith as true, (2) The supernatural as real, (3) The humanness of spirituality, (4) Living in the shadow of the Fall, and (5) All of life under the lordship of Christ. These themes were never intended to be a new creed or a statement of the most important Christian truths. They are simply teachings which the Schaeffers found had been ignored or misunderstood among Christians—with great cost to God’s kingdom. We could easily add another ten to these five. But we will limit our discussion to these five to make strategic corrections both within the church and in recovery of a credible Christian witness to those who are not Christians.

They were developed through the Schaeffers’ study and careful listening to Christian and non-Christian people for literally hours at a time, walking with them in the Swiss mountains and welcoming them into the hospitality of the study community that is L’Abri Fellowship. I am writing this having known Francis Schaeffer for many years while working in L’Abri with my wife Mardi, and continuing in that work for the 36 years since his passing. The five themes stood out in the Schaeffers’ teaching but they cannot be separated from their expression through the L’Abri communities around the world as they have been lived out by students, helpers and workers. I will be drawing from the Schaeffers’ writings but also from many lectures, discussions and conversations, with them and others which will be impossible to footnote properly.

## THE CHRISTIAN FAITH AS TRUE

It is very difficult to “contain” Francis Schaeffer’s view of truth because it touches everything he thought and did, but I will start in 1951 and 1952 with what he called “a spiritual crisis in my own life.” Schaeffer had become a Christian many years before out of agnosticism, been a pastor and then a missionary in post-war Europe, but had become increasingly troubled by what he called “a lack of reality.” This was a crisis for him in two senses. He saw in many who held “the orthodox position,” little of the reality that the Bible teaches should be there as a result of believing in Christ. He also realized that his own sense of reality was less than when he had first become a Christian. He concluded that he had to “go back and rethink my whole position.”<sup>1</sup> This meant cancelling all his speaking and writing commitments and rethinking his reasons for being a Christian at all—for months praying, thinking and walking in the Swiss mountains and when it rained, pacing back and forth in the hayloft of their chalet.

Through that time he came to see that “there were totally sufficient reasons to know that the infinite-personal God does exist and that Christianity is true,” but he also saw and experienced in a new way “the meaning of the finished work of Christ for our present lives. Gradually the sun came out and the song came.” He went on to write, “This was and is the real basis of L’Abri. Teaching the historic Christian answers and giving honest answers to honest questions are crucial; but it was out of these struggles that the reality came without which an incisive work like L’Abri would not have been possible.”<sup>2</sup>

I will mention two of the many places that Francis Schaeffer’s view of truth “touched ground.” First, in his wide experience of the evangelical church, he agonized over how many had never even begun to wrestle with the truth of their own faith. Doubt was not only feared but often forbidden, so people were encouraged to stuff their doubts – perhaps the most dangerous thing you can do with them. He wrote that so many are told “‘Don’t ask questions, dear, just believe.’ It was more spiritual to believe without asking questions than it was to ask questions.”<sup>3</sup> I remember a student who came to our branch of L’Abri in Massachusetts. He had been a Christian for several years and wanted to study prayer, which he had found difficult. We set up his study program together on prayer. Three days later he came back to me and said, “Dick, actually I don’t believe there is a God.” I commended him for

the honesty of his struggle and then helped him put together a completely different program of study. I have often thought of how frustrating it had been for him to beat up on himself for his inability to pray while at the same time pretending to believe in a God whom he doubted was even there to pray to. Schaeffer's plea was that *because* the Christian faith is true, we must be encouraged to put doubts and questions honestly on the table whenever they are there, even as he had done himself. Schaeffer's spiritual integrity led him to wear a number of hats all at the same time—of the pastor, the theologian and the Christian apologist.

The second area has to do with the unity of truth and his critique of modern intellectual history. Again, in his spiritual integrity, he saw the need for a much more incisive understanding of the non-Christian culture of which we are a part, in order for us to live well before God in it and be taken seriously by it. He wrote, "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 . . . It cannot be."<sup>4</sup> He saw also that if Christian people were to be equipped to challenge the mindset around them rather than being swept away by its power or isolated by their own belligerence toward it, he would have to make something accessible to a wide population—not just written from one academic to other academics.

In looking at the Enlightenment and its failures, he observed a destructive split in the idea of truth which has captured much of Western Culture. He called it the "existential methodology." They divided all knowledge into what Schaeffer called upper and lower stories. The "lower story" had to do with where we live, love, work, build things, do science and technology. In this lower story we can describe what we see and do with human language using rational discussion and persuasion, because mathematics and logic apply here. However, the more human nature was studied without reference to a Creator God but from the spirit of human autonomy, the more human stature shrunk to the point that we are only complex machines.

Schaeffer quoted George Wald as a prime example. He was a Harvard chemistry professor who asserted in triumph that we now know that a human being is only a product of chance. He claimed that "Four hundred years ago there was a collection of molecules named Shakespeare which produced *Hamlet*."<sup>5</sup> Schaeffer continued, "According to these theories, that is all that man can be. Man beginning with his proud, proud humanism, tried to make

himself autonomous, but rather than becoming great, he had found himself ending up as only a collection of molecules—and nothing more.”<sup>6</sup> But this conclusion presented enormous problems. A collection of molecules cannot, honestly, account for Shakespeare. Who can live relating to self and others only as collections of molecules? How can a collection of molecules have dignity, freedom, value—or rights? It can’t. If we live only on the lower story, we face a bleak and desolate prospect of facts without meanings, since biology can tell us nothing about what we need and treasure most in life. So, if locked in on the lower story, humans become the most extraordinary misfits on the planet.

This is why the “upper story” is so important to this post-Enlightenment mindset. They could not turn back to the God of the Bible (who had held facts and meanings together) without abandoning the Enlightenment commitment to be free from God’s authority. The upper story had to function as something of a God-substitute which promised to relieve the bleakness and despair of inhabiting the lower story. An upper story was posited, which contained hopes and ideas that could suggest meanings to us, to give some sense of value and significance to our lives, though these hopes would not have a rational foundation or base to support them. In Schaeffer’s words, “...people gave up the concept of a rational, unified field of knowledge and accepted instead the idea of a leap of faith in those areas which make people distinctive as people—purpose, love, morals and so on.”<sup>7</sup>

Here is the modern division of truth. The “lower story” had to do with facts without meaning and the “upper story” with meanings without facts or rational connection to the factual world. Francis Schaeffer had an ability to identify with and feel the despair of people wrestling seriously with these ideas, which was part of his gift as an apologist and evangelist.

Schaeffer also pointed to the streams of modern Christian theology which have adapted themselves to this same divided truth to stay in step with modern culture. Those who do this put the Bible in the lower story—a text in this factual world, with its mistakes, antiquated ideas, socially constructed ethics and superstitious narratives. But in the upper story it can speak of God, Christ, salvation, redemption, heaven and have these words mean to us whatever we find helpful to believe. This is because these religious words in the upper story only carry connotations, symbols and metaphors from past Christian memory, and are not bound to any factual status. The upper

story is locked into theological relativism because no one can really have knowledge of God in categories which could be true or false in any ordinary sense. With this divided truth, one can believe that the body of Jesus is decomposed dust somewhere in Palestine but still find the Easter story hopeful or transformative and so declare it to be “true.”

Francis Schaeffer’s strong conviction was that this division betrays biblical faith. The Bible challenges it with a unified view of truth. The God who has made us in his image has communicated with us in human language which he had created in part for that very purpose. He is perfectly capable of using language to inform us about both facts and meanings which are true about himself, ourselves and how we are to live in relationship with him. It can be rationally understood truly but never exhaustively. As he wrote, “The unity is there because God has spoken truth into all areas of our knowledge.”<sup>8</sup>

Francis Schaeffer wrote, “I often think that one of the reasons there is such an air of unreality in much of the church, and for many people, is that they do not understand what is really meant when we say Christianity is true. This does not mean that Christianity is merely true to a creed, though we should be true to our creeds. It is not even that it is true to the Bible, though certainly our Christianity should be true to the full inspiration of Scripture. But it is rather that Christianity is true to what is really there. It explains the universe and its form. It gives us the truth about who man<sup>9</sup> is and—the great requirement—the truth that God is there. It tells us that the final environment is not impersonal, but personal.”<sup>10</sup>

### **THE SUPERNATURAL AS REAL**

The use of the word “supernatural” has been problematic, so Francis Schaeffer wanted to be clear about what he meant by the word. “The “supernatural” is really no more unusual in the universe, from the biblical viewpoint, than what we normally call the natural. The only reason we call it the supernatural part is because usually we cannot see it. That is all.”<sup>11</sup> As an example he points to Jesus, “Between His resurrection and His ascension He appeared and disappeared many times. He often went back and forth between the seen and he unseen world in those forty days.”<sup>12</sup> So to do a miracle, it is not as if God had to break some natural law. A miracle is God using different means

than what we are used to, to do his work against evil in the world.

Schaeffer believed that the Christian faith is intrinsically a supernatural religion in that it holds that these two worlds exist, the seen and the unseen. This commitment is necessary in our theological convictions and in the daily practice of our faith—otherwise faith has collapsed under the forces of secularism and materialism. To illustrate this truth he suggested that we think of two chairs in a room. We are sitting in one or the other chair every moment of our lives. The man sitting in the first chair faces the whole of reality, the seen and the unseen worlds and that informs his whole life. The second chair is for the man who believes only in the visible world and that informs his whole life. One will be right and the other wrong. They cannot both be right. If there are two halves to reality, the man in the second chair has completely misunderstood the universe. But for the Christian it means really living in the first chair, in awareness of both worlds. Schaeffer wrote, “... it is perfectly possible for a Christian to be so infiltrated by twentieth-century thinking that he lives most of his life as though the supernatural were not there. Indeed, I would suggest that all of us do this to some extent.”<sup>13</sup> The danger is that one can be a Christian but spend much of his or her life sitting in the chair of the materialist in the most basic ways of having desires and making choices as if God was not there. He called this “unfaith.” The non-Christian is in unbelief but the Christian sitting in the materialist’s chair is in unfaith. If we are in unfaith, we are only playing at the Christian life like children playing with toy soldiers when there is actually a real war going on around them. This is because “the real battle is not against flesh and blood but is in the heavenlies, and I cannot partake in that battle in the flesh.”<sup>14</sup>

As Francis and Edith Schaeffer began L’Abri in 1955 they realized as they looked back, that if all the promises about prayer and the Holy Spirit had somehow been removed from the Bible, that it might not have made too much of a difference to them. They concluded that they could not go on in that way. They started L’Abri to stand against tendencies of unfaith for believers and those in the work and also to try to provide evidence to the non-Christian that there really is a living God at work in the world even though we cannot see him. It meant a very conscious dependence on prayer. They decided to never do fund raising for L’Abri in any form but to pray for money to be given to provide for all needs. In the same way they chose to not try to recruit students or workers to L’Abri but to pray for God

to guide the people of his choice to the work and to resist five and ten year planning for the organization itself. I can say personally that the result was a community of very real vitality in which the existence of the community itself was a witness to the truth of the invisible God. This reality challenged me profoundly as a non-Christian wandering Europe in 1964.

It is important here to realize the gifts of Edith Schaeffer in her prodigious energy and creative work making the L'Abri community function but also in her high awareness of the supernatural workings of God in the world and ability to communicate this to a wide range of people. In her book, *The Tapestry*, she weaves together the mysterious work of God with human struggles and choices which become the flow of history that we read about and experience.<sup>15</sup>

### **THE HUMANNESS OF SPIRITUALITY**

Francis Schaeffer wrote that we often associate being “only human” with being sinful ... “but in a more profound sense, the Christian is called to exhibit the characteristics of true humanity, because being a man is not intrinsically being sinful man, but being that which goes back before the Fall, to man made in the image of God. Therefore Christians in their relationship should be the most human people you will ever see. This speaks for God in an age of inhumanity and impersonality and facelessness.”<sup>16</sup>

Schaeffer addressed a tension between humanness and ideas of spiritual maturity. If our theology holds that we are basically worms, having no value unless we are doing specifically religious activities by the power of the Holy Spirit, we will miss the very positive view of humanity made explicit by our creation as images of God. Schaeffer used the term “glorious ruin” to describe every human person. We are glorious by creation, having been made to resemble God, but fallen into ruin by betraying God through our sin. Our likeness to God has not been lost in the Fall but seriously bent and twisted by it. We are still “fearfully and wonderfully made” (Ps 139:14) even after the Fall.

The question is raised, what does God aim at doing in the process of our salvation, after our justification? A good way to begin the answer would be that he is renewing and restoring our likeness to himself. Jesus is the perfect image of God and our calling is to imitate him, to become like Jesus who



lived out human excellence. As we do that, our particular likeness to God becomes more real in and through us in a way that it could not in any other individual. You could think of it as being like restoring a fine painting which has been seriously damaged but which can be brought back at least closer to its earlier grandeur. The final resurrection of the bodies of all believers is the finale of God's renewal of our humanness.<sup>17</sup>

A woman came to L'Abri who loved playing the violin and played it well. She had been told by well-meaning Christians that she should give up her violin as a witness that she loved God more than her music. What they had missed was that our witness is to use every gift that God has given us to praise, worship and honor God by our use of it. If it gives us great joy, so much the greater praise! Any beauty that we may create is a reflection and response to the extraordinary beauty that God has invested in his creation. How amazing that God has given us the capacity to appreciate beauty and to even create beauty ourselves, each in our own ways. But we should say this not just about beauty, but about justice, healing, teaching, doing science, running a business, serving others and the use of all of our God-imaging gifts in his service.

Edith Schaeffer was very gifted at communicating these truths in word and deed, with great attention to beauty in detail. Her book, *Hidden Art*,<sup>18</sup> has helped many people to make this real. I remember that a friend of mind stumbled into the Schaeffers' L'Abri chalet late one night, unannounced and a stranger. Edith Schaeffer was still up, working in the kitchen on meals for the next day and quickly discovered that he had not had a meal in a long time. Within minutes, filled with conversation, she brought him a tray with a hot meal, a tiny flower arrangement and a lit candle on the tray. He couldn't believe it. But it was a small piece of what eventually enabled him to believe that a loving God is really there. This is the humanness of spirituality and the spirituality of humanness which is so needed in this world of "inhumanity and impersonality and facelessness."

## **LIVING IN THE SHADOW OF THE FALL**

We have mentioned Francis Schaeffer's use of the designation of each human person as a "glorious ruin," and found the "glory" in being made in the likeness of God himself. When it comes to the "ruin," we are dealing with sin and the Fall. Schaeffer saw, in a world filled with utopian thinking, dogmas of

inevitable progress and pop-culture sentimentality, that there was a serious need to be enlightened by the idea of the Fall and its present day applications. He saw these consequences to be extremely far-reaching, into every area of our lives. Here is a compressed form of his view, from the third chapter of Genesis.

From the Christian viewpoint, all the alienations that we find in man have come because of man's historic, space-time fall. First of all, man is separated from God; second, he is separated from himself (thus the psychological problems of life); third, he is separated from other men (thus the sociological problems of life); fourth, he is separated from nature (thus the problems of living in the world—for example, the ecological problems). All these need healing.<sup>19</sup>

If we start with the nature of sin as described in the Bible, we will begin to see the challenge of living in the shadow of the fall. The temptation which led them into rebellion against God in the garden was the promise that if they ate the fruit “. . . your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil” (Gen 3:5). This was not just the breaking of an arbitrary rule but a grasp at divine status and authority as God's rivals. It was an attempt to step out of their place as finite creatures of God, to have God-like authority especially over good and evil themselves. This is the direction toward which sin has warped us ever since, toward feeling entitled to autonomy, being a law unto ourselves. No wonder Adam and Eve hid in the bushes when God approached them in the garden, knowing already that something had gone terribly wrong with their mutiny. Their relationship to God was broken and for them and their descendants, the only hope of reconciliation would depend on mercy from the God they had offended. Schaeffer wrote, “Man no longer has the communion with God that he was meant to have. Therefore, he cannot fulfill the purpose of his existence—to love God with all his heart, soul and mind.”<sup>20</sup> The consequences of this alienation cause disorder in every area of human life.

The second separation is that there will be internal alienations and lack of integrity within us. We are separated from ourselves and can immediately think of countless psychological conflicts. Schaeffer writes, “Thus we have self-deception. All men are liars, but, most importantly, each man lies to himself. The greatest falsehood is not lying to other men, but to ourselves.”

He goes on to say that this self-deception undermines our ability to have true knowledge, since our perspective itself is warped. We tend to use our God-imagining capacities not so much to image God but to glorify ourselves. We can be cruel, but we have a great investment in covering our tracks, doing damage control, hiding our sin from ourselves and each other. Sin also separates us from God's high purpose for our sexuality, enabling men and women to reduce sex to exploitation of each other.<sup>21</sup> The final internal separation is body from spirit in our death.

The third separation of the fall is the alienation of people from each other. The immediate social response after the fall was blame shifting and recrimination. Not long after in this new family, one brother murders the other. It should not surprise us that human history tells of the readiness of one person to use another for selfish ends, an extraordinary ability to inflict suffering on each other as well as to tolerate the suffering of others while doing nothing about it. The stakes get higher and lines of moral responsibility get more complex when the players are larger communities of people even up to the size of nations, given human proclivity to exploitation, corruption and war. There never has been a fully just society, a fully harmonious marriage or fully unified church. That should grieve us but not surprise or ultimately discourage us.

The fourth separation is the separation of people from nature. Schaeffer writes, "Man has lost his full dominion, and now nature itself is often a means of judgment."<sup>22</sup> The Genesis account states that work will involve toil and finally, "... you are dust and to dust you shall return" (Gen 3:19). Humans were made to have dominion over the earth as stewards but after the Fall, the earth has dominion over us all, as every graveyard illustrates. Schaeffer again, "The simple fact is that in wanting to be what man as a creature could not be, man lost what finite man could be in his proper place ... Man still stands in the image of God—twisted, broken, abnormal, but still the image-bearer of God ... By the Fall man has not lost his being as a human being. He has not lost those things which he intrinsically is as a man. He has not become an animal or a machine. And as I look out over the human race and see the lost—separated from God, separated from themselves, separated from other people, separated from nature—they are still people. Man still has tremendous value."<sup>23</sup>

We have looked briefly at the Fall and its consequences. Questions that start lively discussions in LAbri branches are, "OK, how *are* we meant to live

in this world? What does it mean to live in the shadow of the Fall? How do we avoid cynicism or resignation on one side and naïve optimism on the other?”

A place to begin might be to think carefully about how we learn our expectations. Where do they come from? They have an enormous influence on what we aim at in our lives but also on how we respond to things that happen to us from beyond our control. What do we expect for ourselves? Why? Does being close to God mean that we will get rich? Not get cancer? Never have a bad car accident? Be happy? Live to old age? If we think so, we are likely to be in for unnecessary trouble.

One spiritual director remarked from her long experience that Christian people are apt to pursue a life that is made up of a “workable framework of rules in a fixable world that most of us can follow without any real effort.”<sup>24</sup> Can you imagine where these expectations come from? Can you see where they might lead? Can you think of how they might collide with the separations that we have just described or the truths of the rest of the Bible?

To highlight the importance of expectations and how we soak them up from our culture, I will quote part of a passage from Daniel Boorstin, a social historian of the past generation. It is about what he calls “extravagant expectations” in modern America.

We expect anything and everything. We expect the contradictory and the impossible. We expect compact cars which are spacious, luxurious cars which are economical. We expect to be rich and charitable, powerful and merciful, active and reflective, kind and competitive. We expect to be inspired by mediocre appeals for excellence, to be made literate by illiterate appeals for literacy. We expect to eat and stay thin, to be constantly on the move and ever more neighborly, to go to the “church of our choice” and yet feel its guiding power over us, to revere God and to be God.

Never have people been more the masters of their environment. Yet never has a people felt more deceived and disappointed. For never has a people expected so much more than the world could offer.<sup>25</sup>

Boorstin pictures a world which is designed from the blueprint of my desires and sense of entitlement. It may seem to work for us for a while—if we are young, rich, healthy, happy, attractive, powerful and popular. Otherwise, it is no surprise that it disappoints.

How often do we allow ourselves to think, “If only one thing were different

in our lives, everything would click together and my life would make sense?": "If only my job was more fulfilling..."; "If only I was married..."; "If only I *wasn't* married..."; "If only I was more financially secure..."; "If only my church was...". These are all important variables in our lives but none of them can provide a guarantee of the frustration-free existence which we may let ourselves imagine.

There is a lot to be said positively for internalizing the negative realities of our fallenness into our expectations. It makes a difference in communities small and large, whether there is room made for failure and for dealing with what goes wrong. Communities tend to last longer when allowances are made for imperfection. Marriages, to flourish, need two people who are pretty good at confession, forgiveness and reproof when needed. Governments able to maintain justice over time tend to need checks and balances by the separation of powers which can anticipate and block power abuse. In contrast, it is easy to think of good but imperfect relationships, communities and institutions which have been smashed by people demanding something closer to perfection. The connection between utopian political "experiments" and terror is well established.

The Bible is a book which overwhelmingly deals with human failures and the ways God helps us to deal with them—all the way to the return of Christ and the final resurrection. God does this not by helping us to ignore, deny or hide them, pretending everything is wonderful now. In the wisdom of Proverbs, "the righteous man falls seven times and rises again, but the wicked are overthrown by a calamity" (Prov 24:16). Notice that the difference between them is not that the wicked habitually falls down and the righteous always remain standing. It is that the identity of the righteous is not undone by his or her own failures—their trust is in the God of mercy in his forgiveness and help—so they know they can get up again and keep walking. Perfection is not possible in this life but with God's help change is possible. The answer is not giving in to cynicism or resignation. By God's grace we can make a difference in ourselves and in the world around us.

Francis Schaeffer wrote, "I have discovered that hard twentieth-century people do not expect Christians to be perfect. They do not throw it in our teeth when, individually or corporately, they find less than perfection in us. They do not expect perfection, but they do expect reality; and they have a right to expect reality, upon the authority of Jesus Christ."<sup>26</sup>

## **ALL OF LIFE UNDER THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST**

This theme sounds strange to the ears of some Christians. Isn't it too obvious to discuss this among those who believe in Christ's divinity? I have never met a Christian who claimed that Christ was the Lord of three-quarters or some lesser percentage of his or her life. But it is not so simple, because it is not at all obvious when and if the lordship of Christ is getting narrowed, abridged, compromised, ignored, defied or forgotten. This was a major concern for Francis Schaeffer, and one of the unifying themes in his work. I will quote him at some length.

There is no dichotomy in the Bible between the intellectual and cultural on one hand and the spiritual on the other. But often there has been a strong Platonic emphasis in evangelicalism, a strong tendency to divide man into two parts—his spiritual nature and everything else. We must take that conception like a piece of baked clay, break it in our hands, and throw it away. We must consciously reject the Platonic element which has been added to Christianity. God made the whole man; the whole man is redeemed in Christ. And after we are Christians, the Lordship of Christ covers the whole man. That includes his so-called spiritual things and his intellectual, creative and cultural things; it includes his law, his sociology, and psychology; it includes every single part and portion of a man and his being...

If Christianity is truth as the Bible claims, it must touch every aspect of life. If I draw a pie and that pie comprises the whole of life, Christianity will touch every slice. In every sphere of our lives, Christ will be our Lord and the Bible will be our norm.<sup>27</sup>

Schaeffer refers to a particular set of ideas and practices which is actually alien to the worldview of the Bible but which has been quite seductive to Christian people for so long that it can be hard to untangle from true faith. It follows the direction of Plato's thinking in putting spirit over and against matter but it also includes the opposition of "sacred" from "secular." As Schaeffer said, it opposes "the intellectual and cultural on the one hand and the spiritual on the other." It divides life between the "sacred," which means things which address God directly such as prayer, worship, Bible study, spiritual gifts, church life and evangelism, from what is "secular."

What “secular” means is what is basically all the rest of life and involvement in God’s creation—politics, the arts, music, the life of the mind in general, education, law, farming, the business world, medicine, economics, science, the environment, social justice. Concern and work in these “secular” areas is not necessarily sin (because much of it is necessary for society to function), but it is less important, less pleasing to God. He cares less about them since they are not related as directly to the eternal. You can be involved with them but you should not be passionate about them because that would show less than full loyalty to God.

Certainly the opposition between spiritual and material does not exist in the Bible which begins by God’s creation of a material universe and ends in its renewal. C. S. Lewis is helpful here, “There is no good trying to be more spiritual than God. God never meant man to be a purely spiritual creature. That is why He uses material things like bread and wine to put new life into us. We may think this rather crude and unspiritual. God does not. He invented eating. He likes matter. He invented it.”<sup>28</sup>

I was trying to explain these ideas to one of our students, when he asked with some exasperation, “Well, tell me, what is more spiritual to do, to pray or to wash dishes?” His assumption was that *anyone* could tell that it was more spiritual to pray, but that answer assumed the very sacred/secular division that I wanted him to give up. I disappointed him by saying, “I can’t say which is more *intrinsically* pleasing to God. I can imagine occasions when it might actually be sin to pray instead of washing dishes—like when it is your turn to wash dishes.”

It seems that praying or washing dishes can be either honoring to God or actually sinful—depending on all sorts of variables. (In certain situations you could do either just to show off your spiritual superiority to an observing public.) If I say that praying is automatically more pleasing to God, I begin to feel like a follower of Plato (“Turn to higher things, the material world isn’t important, let the dirty dishes pile up, it doesn’t really matter.”) If on the other hand I say that dish washing is intrinsically more pleasing to God than praying, I begin to feel like a Marxist (“The material world is all there is, praying is just a pious excuse that Christians have thought up to get someone else to wash their dishes.”)

Allowing this opposition of sacred and secular brings a division where the Bible does not allow it. The Bible teaches that the whole creation is good and

challenges us to choose for Christ as lord in every area of life. The sacred/secular view sets different parts of God's creation against each other, tearing the fabric of God's creation. But the Bible shows the real conflict not to be *between* parts of God's creation, but in our choices for or against God's will *in every part* of God's creation. Nothing is neutral or irrelevant to God in our lives.

One of the places where these ideas have always been important at L'Abri is in questions about vocation, a major source of anxiety today. The sacred/secular mistake has done its damage. From it, many people have a picture of a vocational pyramid. At the top, closest to God and for those who most mean business with him are vocations of Christian ministry, evangelism or at least "full time Christian work" of some sort. The next level down, for those less fully committed to God would be the "helping professions" of medicine, teaching, counseling, social work, since they are directed toward people. For the lower level, those still less dedicated to God, there is the business world, science, farming, the arts, law, and politics.

The attraction of this pyramid is that it takes choices of enormous complexity that a Christian person must wrestle with, and seems to provide a way to radically simplify and prioritize those choices. The problem is that the Bible does not give us this pyramid or these priorities. The apostle Paul even said things like, "...*aspire* to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we directed you" (1 Thess 4:11). The New Testament did not tell Roman soldiers who became Christians to quit the military and become missionaries. It does suggest a wide openness to serve God wherever God may lead you and that your service is part of your worship of Christ as lord. Vocations are not ranked by God. I can imagine some situations in which we might want to trade quite a few theologians and even some missionaries for one good plumber. Of course there are also other situations when we would need one good theologian more than an army of plumbers—all because the body of Christ is made up by many members with different gifts and callings, and the ways to serve the common good are immensely diverse.

So, the line separating what does and does not please God does *not* run between praying and dishwashing, between evangelism and carpentry, or between Christian ministry and farming or running a business that serves the common good. They are all activities within God's good creation. But the separating line *does* run between serving others and refusing to serve



others, between generosity and greed, between motivations of humility and arrogance in any activity, between obeying and disobeying Jesus as you do any of the tasks we could mention.

Of course there are some occupations which are intrinsically sinful, such as robbery, prostitution, dealing illegal drugs or running the mob. But that leaves a lot of room for a great range of vocations to which God might call us. Schaeffer often said that all tasks can be pleasing to God, except what is sin. There are also warnings in the Bible to not let ourselves be so dominated by anything in this good, created world that we make it a God-substitute, or idol, whether it is material or non-material. That is not because this created world is bad or unimportant to God. Creation is good but it is not God. Don't treat it as God. Treat only God as God and his good creation as his good creation.

There are many casualties of the sacred/secular syndrome. I have known some who felt unable to occupy the top of the pyramid since they did not feel that they had gifts for "full time Christian ministry." They then devalued their "secular" work in their own eyes, and so did it half-heartedly, instrumentally, as something to be endured because it was necessary to live, but not something that God cared about. They often invested little creativity or imagination in their work and then found it boring. They sometimes become vulnerable to the powerful idolatries of our society which *do* capture imaginations which had been unmotivated or unfocused.

If we don't think God cares much about our work in the "secular" world, we are unlikely to have a faith which inspires Jesus' followers to do constructive, helpful, creative and interesting things in God's world to serve him in serving the common good. In the midst of the present polarizing atmosphere of our "culture wars," this is especially important for Christian people to live out. Tim Keller, certainly a defender of Biblical truth, wrote, "'Evangelical' used to denote people who claimed the high moral ground; now, in popular usage, the word is nearly synonymous with 'hypocrite.'"<sup>29</sup> In so far as he is right about this popular usage, it becomes, to say the least, a major obstacle to evangelism. This is a great loss of the persuasive power to show Jesus to be attractive and credible in our society. Jesus expects us to be part of a public witness to God's justice, love, creativity, compassion, to be salt and light in the world, "...that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven" (Matt 5:16).

Our minds are to be renewed and offered to God. Even our most mundane activities are things that he cares about. The apostle Paul wrote that we are to eat “in honor of the Lord” (Rom 14:6), giving thanks to God. We are to work “as to the Lord” (Eph 6:7). He writes of our sexuality that it is important to God because our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit, “. . . you were bought with a price, therefore glorify God in your body” (1 Cor 6:19-20). That is eating, working and the expression of our sexuality—those are about as “secular” as you can get. Yet here is the Scripture saying “These things matter to God. He cares about your response to him in each of these ways.”

I will end with Francis Schaeffer’s emphasis on the arts under the lordship of Christ. “For a Christian redeemed by the work of Christ and living within the norms of the Scripture and under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, the Lordship of Christ should include an interest in the arts. A Christian should use these arts to the glory of God—not just as tracts, but as things of beauty to the praise of God. An art work can be a doxology in itself.”<sup>30</sup>

I have tried to show in these five themes something of the fruit of Francis Schaeffer’s spiritual integrity as it has touched individual Christian people, the church and the Christian faith in the world. I have tried to show also that they did not die with him but are vital and relevant in the work of L’Abri which has followed him. Of these themes, the lordship of Christ over all of life is the most inclusive. It was a unifying theme in all of his life’s work. He saw it as a birthright of the Protestant Reformation which had fallen into neglect, but which was surely recoverable. In fact in the years since his passing, a great deal has happened which is encouraging toward this recovery.

As the Psalmist says, “The earth is the Lord’s and all that is in it, the world, and those who live in it; for he has founded it on the seas, and established it on the rivers” (Ps 24:1-2). As Isaiah saw the vision of God in the temple and heard the Seraphim say, “Holy, holy, holy is the Lord of hosts, the whole earth is full of his glory” (Isa 6:3). Do you see a little bit of that glory?

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1 Francis A. Schaeffer, *True Spirituality* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972), 1.

2 *Ibid.*, 2.

3 Francis A. Schaeffer, *The New Super-Spirituality*, in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, Vol. 3 (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1982), 388.

4 Francis A. Schaeffer, *Two Contents, Two Realities*, in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, Vol. 3, 414.

5 Francis A. Schaeffer, *How Shall We Then Live?* (Old Tappan, NJ: Fleming Revell Company, 1976), 164.

- <sup>6</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>7</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who is There*, in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, Vol. 1 (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1982), 43.
- <sup>8</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *The God Who is There* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1968), 93.
- <sup>9</sup> All of Francis Schaeffer's earlier books were written at a time when the custom was to use the word "man" generically, to refer to all humans, men and women. By the time he put together the *Collected Works*, he wanted to change this but re-writing the 21 books seemed to him a "horrendous task." So he wrote in the preface to each of the five volumes, "Please therefore forgive me, anyone who would be disturbed, and please read the usage in the older accepted way. I would be overwhelmingly sorry if anyone would be "put off." Please read it as "man" equaling a human being and all human beings—whoever you are—women and men, children and adults."
- <sup>10</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Church at the End of the Twentieth Century* (London: Norfolk Press, 1970), 55.
- <sup>11</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *True Spirituality* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1972), 78.
- <sup>12</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *Death in the City*, in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, Vol. 3, 293.
- <sup>13</sup> Schaeffer, *True Spirituality*, 78-79.
- <sup>14</sup> Ibid., 80.
- <sup>15</sup> Edith S. Schaeffer, *The Tapestry* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1981).
- <sup>16</sup> Schaeffer, *The God Who is There*, 159.
- <sup>17</sup> The failure to grasp the personal significance of being made in God's image was so widely experienced that two workers from the English L'Abri, Ranald Macaulay and Jerram Barrs, wrote a book together called *Being Human, The Nature of Spiritual Experience* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1978). They addressed this issue very well.
- <sup>18</sup> Edith S. Schaeffer, *Hidden Art* (London: Norfolk Press, 1971).
- <sup>19</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *Death in the City*, in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, Vol. 4 (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1982), 262-3.
- <sup>20</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *Genesis in Space and Time*, in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, Vol. 2 (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1982), 69.
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid., 69-70.
- <sup>22</sup> Ibid., 70.
- <sup>23</sup> Ibid., 70-71.
- <sup>24</sup> Margaret Guenther, *Holy Listening* (Boston, MA: Cowley Publications, 1992), xii.
- <sup>25</sup> Daniel Boorstin, *The Image* (New York: Atheneum, 1977), 4.
- <sup>26</sup> Schaeffer, *The God Who is There*, 153.
- <sup>27</sup> Schaeffer, *Two Contents, Two Realities*, in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, Vol. 3, 412-13.
- <sup>28</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York: Macmillan Publishing Co., 1952), Book II, Ch. 5, 50.
- <sup>29</sup> Tim Keller, quoted in Peter Wehner, "Evangelicals: A Review" in "Comment," May 7, 2020, from the Ethics & Public Policy Center, 3.
- <sup>30</sup> Schaeffer, *Art and the Bible*, in *The Collected Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*.