

FRANCIS SCHAEFFER'S MINISTRY

Editor's Note: *Francis Schaeffer has come to hold a very influential position among evangelical Christians throughout the world especially as a result of his evangelistic work from his base in the village of L'Abri in Switzerland. His books and more recently his films have gotten wide attention. In February, 1978, THE OUTLOOK Magazine reprinted his famous "Watershed" speech on the inerrancy of the Bible and in March, 1978, placed an article on his work by John Byker who had spent some time at L'Abri. In May and June, 1977, The Reformed Journal ran two articles by Jack Rogers under the title "Francis Schaeffer: the Promise and the Problem." Professor Rogers of Fuller Theological Seminary, received his doctorate from the Free University of Amsterdam.*

In the Reformed Journal articles Rogers, although speaking appreciatively of Schaeffer's influence as an evangelist, was highly critical of his whole line of thought, dismissing it as an unscholarly and dated carry-over of the old Princeton theology of Hodge, Warfield and Machen and utterly failing to do justice to the complexity of modern problems. Rev. John D. Tangelder, Christian Reformed missionary at Bacolod City in the Philippines responds to this criticism, giving his evaluation.

No, I don't have a picture of Dr. Francis Schaeffer hanging in my bedroom, which also serves as my study. I don't believe in hero worship, but I do have admiration for Dr. Schaeffer's ministry. His influence is widespread in evangelical circles through his books, articles, lectures, tapes and his film series, "*How Should We Then Live?*" Yes, I thank God for Dr. Schaeffer's work and L'Abri. I have had the privilege of meeting with Dr. Schaeffer at the North-West L'Abri Conference, Calgary, Alberta, and listened to his introduction of his film series in a Toronto, Ontario, church. And some years ago, I spent three weeks at the Dutch L'Abri (Eck en Wiel). This was a spiritually enriching and intellectually stimulating experience. The fellowship was great. The lectures by scholars such as Dr. Bob Goudzwaard were excellent. The tape library was well "stocked" and helpful. On the way to the Philippines, our family spent four weeks travelling through Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg and Germany. Our weekends were spent at the Dutch L'Abri. While at L'Abri I was shown Dr. Jack Rogers' articles, "*Francis Schaeffer: the promise and the problem*," the *Reformed Journal*, May, June 1977. After I had read them, I asked myself: "Is Dr. Rogers not painting a caricature of Dr. Schaeffer?" Sure, Dr. Schaeffer's ministry is not perfect. He will be the first one to admit this. The L'Abri workers are also aware of the weaknesses and limitations of L'Abri. They are realistic. But Dr. Schaeffer should have received a better treatment from the pen of Dr. Rogers. It is not my intention to give a detailed evaluation of Dr. Rogers' articles, but a few misrepresentations need to be exposed.

1. Prophet

What is the role of Schaeffer in the evangelical movement? He must be seen as a prophet calling our civilization and the Church herself back to God.

As a prophet he paints with bold strokes the direction the Church should take. He is sharply different from the "stereo-type" fundamentalist by his cultural awareness, his intellectual alertness and his compassionate life-style. As a prophet he should be listened to. His warnings are urgent. "Today not only in philosophy but in politics, government, and individual morality, our generation sees solutions in terms of synthesis and not absolutes. When this happens, truth, as people had always thought of truth has died" (p. 163, *How Should We Then Live?*). Evangelical churches need to pay attention to life-style and attitudes. What kind of image does the world have of us? In his address presented at the International Congress on World Evangelization, Lausanne, Switzerland, Schaeffer said: "We have something to ask the Lord to forgive us for the ugliness with which we have often treated each other when we are in different camps.... We need two orthodoxies: first, an orthodoxy of doctrine and, second, an orthodoxy of community. Why was the early church able, within one century, to spread from the Indus River to Spain? Think of that: one century, India to Spain. When we read in Acts and in the Epistles, we find a church that had and practiced both orthodoxies (doctrine and community), and this could be observed by the world. Thus they commended the gospel to the world of that day and the Holy Spirit was not grieved" (p. 26, 2 Contents, 2 Realities).

2. Evangelist

Dr. Schaeffer does not claim to have the last word in evangelical scholarship. He wants to speak evangelistically to "modern" man with his great needs, and not "just" to produce a comprehensive, well-documented history of ideas. He simply desires to document his case persuasively enough for the non-Christian to see that the answer does not lie in modern-secular culture, but in the Christian alternative. As prophet-evangelist he appeals to the students and many are listening.

3. Research

Dr. Rogers claims that "Schaeffer has said that he would never quote any modern theologians. He does not want people to read them lest they become confused" (p. 15 May, 1977). This is news to me. I have heard Schaeffer encourage students to go to the original sources. He does this himself as much as possible. Of course at L'Abri you study Schaeffer's tape, those of other L'Abri workers and guest lecturers. L'Abri does not have a research library. It does not claim to be an academic center. It is a place where searchers can come with their questions; where Christians can receive fellowship and encouragement. Of course, Schaeffer encourages people to study Reformed theologians, but not only Warfield, Machen and Hodge, but also Abraham Kuyper, C. Van Til and many others. I encourage my students to do the same.

4. Misrepresentation

Dr. Rogers accuses Schaeffer of lack of scholarship. But is it scholarly to misquote and misrepresent your "opponent"? Dr. Rogers quotes Schaeffer as saying, "that it is a central purpose of the Bible to teach us what has occurred in the cosmos" (p. 135). He

alleges: The new liberal theology, because it says that the Bible does not touch the cosmos or history, has no real basis for applying the Bible's values in a historical situation, in either morals or law. Everything religious is in the area of non-reason, and since reason has no place there, there is no room for discussion; there are only arbitrary pronouncements' (p. 177)." The exact quote on p. 135 of *How Should We Then Live?* sheds a different light on Schaeffer's position. He did say: "Man, including science, is not autonomous. He is to take seriously what the Bible teaches about history and about that which it teaches has occurred in the cosmos. Yes, upon the base of the Bible's teaching, science and art are intrinsically valuable before both men and God." Rogers, after having misrepresented Schaeffer, tries to correct him by saying: "We must first set the historical record straight. It is not just the 'new liberal theology' which contends that the purpose of the Bible is to speak to matters of salvation, faith and life, and not to science and history. The major theologians of the Christian tradition have always held that position. Augustine, for instance, said about astronomy that 'although our authors knew the truth about the shape of the heavens, the Spirit of God who spoke by them did not intend to teach men these things, in no way profitable for salvation' (cited by Polman, *The Word of God According to St. Augustine*, pp. 59-60). Calvin in his commentary on Genesis 1:15, 16 recommends that we seek information about the stars from astronomers, not from Moses. . . . All of these theologians are reflecting the biblical position as expressed in John 20: 30 and 31: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name" (p. 17, June 1977). Dr. Schaeffer would say in response: "Dr. Rogers, what is your problem? You have misrepresented my position. I agree with St. Augustine and John Calvin. I am standing in the historic Reformed tradition."

5. Dr. Schaeffer's position

What is Dr. Schaeffer's position? In his booklet *No Final Conflict. The Bible Without Error in all that it Affirms*. Dr. Schaeffer says that "God has given four revelations to man. The first two are general revelation, the second two, special revelation. The general revelations are, first the universe and its form, " second man and his mannishness. It should be noted that Paul stressed both of these in Romans 1. The two special revelations are the verbalized communication from God to man in the Bible, and second, the revelation of God in Christ. Rightly understood, these four revelations will always compose one revelation" (p. 23Q. And Dr. Schaeffer believes that "the verbalized communication from God to man in the Bible" is infallible, inerrant. He also insists on the historicity of Biblical events. God reveals "true truth" and not just teaching models. For example, we cannot speak about the fall of man into sin as religious truth. The fall has happened in space and time. He says: "The first half of Genesis is history, space-time history, the Fall is a space-time Fall, or we have no knowledge of what Jesus came to die for and we have no way to understand that God is really a good God. Our whole answer to evil rests upon the historic, space-time Fall. There was a time before man revolted against God. The internal evidence of Genesis and the external evidences (given in the New Testament by the way the New Testament speaks of the first half of Genesis) show that the first half of Genesis is really meant to be space-time

history. We must understand that here we are dealing with history -that is, space and time, the warp and woof of history" (p. 10).

In *Genesis in Space and Time* Schaeffer writes: "If we take away the historicity of Adam, we are left breathless! If we tamper with this ordinary way of understanding what is written in the Bible, the structure of Christianity is reduced to only an existential leap" (p. 43).

What is the purpose of the Bible? Is it given to us to gain accurate information about science or mathematics? Dr. Schaeffer says: "We often hear the statement, 'The Bible is not a scientific textbook.' Should we say this or not? It depends on what we mean. Years ago, before I heard anyone else use this phrase, I used it, but I meant by it that we must remember what the central purpose of the Bible is. The central purpose of the Bible is to give us what fallen man needs to know between the Fall and the second coming of Christ. This is the theme of the book and is dealt with great intensity and great uniformity throughout the Bible. It seems to me that everything else is secondary to this and is to be seen in reference to this central theme. . . . The Bible is not a scientific text book in the sense that science is not its central theme, and we do not have a comprehensive statement about the cosmos. . . . 'The Bible is not a scientific textbook' is true in the sense in which we have just spoken. But many people today use the statement in a different way, that is, to say that the Bible does not affirm anything about that in which science has an interest. When the statement is used to mean this, it must be totally rejected. The Bible does give affirmations about that in which science has an interest" (p. 22f.). In *Genesis in Space and Time* he repeats the same argument. He says: "It is necessary for us to remind ourselves again just what kind of book the Bible is. As I have already indicated, the Bible is a book for fallen men. Wherever it touches upon anything, it does so with true truth, but not with exhaustive truth. That is, where it speaks of the cosmos, science, what it says is true. Likewise, where it touches history with what I call true truth; that is, prepositional, objective truth." For Schaeffer then, the central purpose of the Bible is, "that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name" (John 20:31). Dr. Schaeffer holds to a strong view of Scripture. He is not only orthodox, but also compassionate. I appreciate Dr. Schaeffer's emphasis on these two orthodoxies - truth and practice.

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September 1978