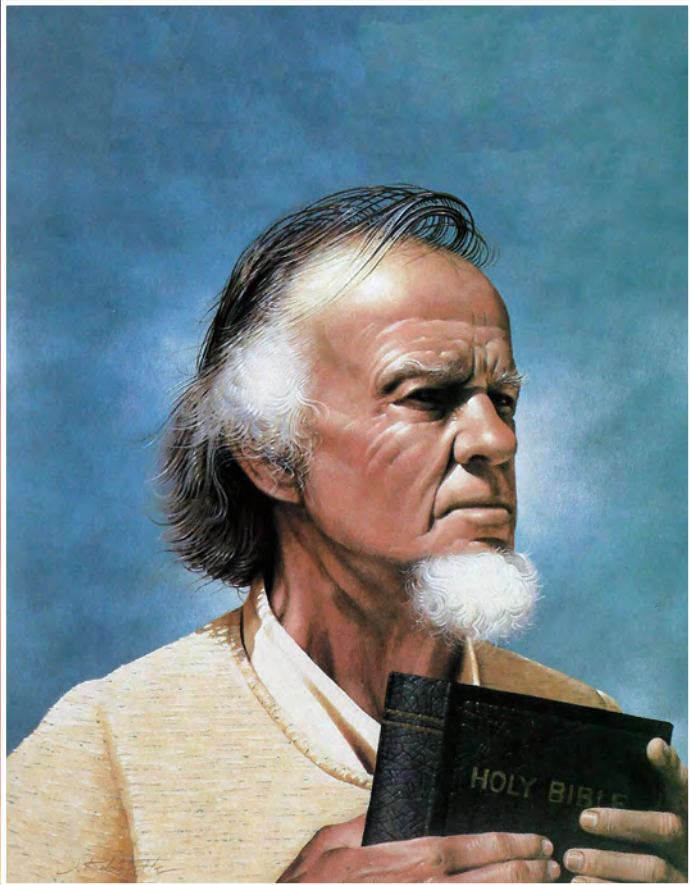


# *Francis Schaeffer*

## God's Spokesman for a Christian Worldview



by David R. Reagan

---

*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.*

At the end of his life in 1984, at age 72, Francis Schaeffer had established himself as the leading Christian spokesman against theological Modernism, philosophical Humanism and political Pragmatism. On the positive side, he had become Christendom's foremost spokesman in behalf of a Christian worldview.

- U.S. Surgeon General, Dr. C. Everett Koop, called him, "God's man for the era."
- Billy Graham said of him, "He was truly one of the great evangelical statesmen of our generation...More than virtually any other thinker, he had a keen insight into the major theological and philosophical battles of our time."
- President Ronald Reagan wrote to his family, "He will long be remembered as one of the great Christian thinkers of our century."
- *Time* magazine described him as "a missionary to intellectuals."
- Schaeffer said of himself, "I really am a country preacher. But I had to develop my philosophy to speak to a world that no longer believes that truth exists."

---

Francis Schaeffer spent his life advocating a Christian worldview. In the process he fiercely defended the inerrancy of the Scriptures and the existence of God. He also proclaimed the sanctity of human life and constantly warned the Western World about the dangers of Humanism.

Much of what he had to say was highly theological and philosophical in nature and difficult to comprehend, but in his final years, he brought his message down to earth through books and documentary films that were aimed at the layperson.

### **Early Life**

Francis August Schaeffer, IV was born in 1912 in Germantown, Pennsylvania. Neither of his parents were Christians, and neither of them were well educated. His father was a common laborer with only a third grade education.

Francis became a Christian at age 17 after his interest in Greek philosophy ultimately led him to read the Bible. Later in life, he observed: “What rang the bell for me was the answers in Genesis, and that with these you had answers — real answers — and without these there were no answers either in philosophy or in the religion I had heard preached.”

When he told his parents of his plan to attend Hampden-Sydney College in Virginia in order to study for the ministry, they strongly opposed the idea. But he went anyway, not knowing how he would be able to afford it. The college was an all-male school affiliated with the Presbyterian Church.

At the end of his freshman year in 1932, Francis met the woman who would become his wife. She was Edith Seville, who was a student at Beaver College for Women in Pennsylvania. Both had returned home for the summer, and they met at the Presbyterian church where they were attending.

Edith had radically different background. Both of her parents were college graduates and were Christian missionaries to China, where Edith was born. She was two years younger than Francis.

Despite the fact that Francis had a hot temper and Edith had a strong

---

will, they fell in love and were married in 1935. One of the key elements that drew them together was the fact that both were Fundamentalists who strongly believed in the inerrancy of the Scriptures.

Francis proceeded on to the newly established Faith Theological Seminary in Wilmington, Delaware, from which he graduated in 1938. He then became the first graduate to be ordained in the Bible Presbyterian Church, a new denomination that had broken away from the Orthodox Presbyterian Church over the issue of inerrancy.

### **Early Ministry**

After spending nine years pastoring Bible Presbyterian churches in Pennsylvania and Missouri, the denomination's foreign missions board sent Francis on a three-month trip to Europe to build a network among "Bible-believing" churches and pastors. He quickly discovered that the European churches were caught up in apostasy.

After reporting back to the missions board about what he had discovered in Europe, the board decided to send him and his wife to Europe as missionaries. So, in 1948, they departed the States and settled in Lausanne, Switzerland.

Shortly before their departure, one of their daughters became seriously ill and required surgery at Philadelphia Children's Hospital. Her surgeon was Dr. C. Everett Koop, who had just become a Christian a few weeks before. The Schaeffers hit it off with Dr. Koop, and they became life-long friends, laying the groundwork for a very important collaboration that would take place 29 years later in 1977.

Three years after his move to Switzerland, Schaeffer experienced a crisis of faith during which he "rethought everything." The experience proved to be a major turning point in his life. He emerged from it with a complete and strong reaffirmation of faith. His biographer, Louis Gifford Parkhurst, Jr., states that Francis came out of the struggle "with the firm conviction that God is truly, objectively *there* whether we think He is or not, that the Bible is true in all that it affirms, that the Bible applies to the whole of life, and that the spiritual reality of the love and holiness of the

---

Holy Spirit must be present in our lives, especially so while fighting for the truth.”

## **L’Abri Fellowship**

In 1955, the Schaeffers moved to Huémoz, Switzerland and established a ministry called L’Abri Fellowship. The name, L’Abri, is French for “The Shelter.” It quickly became a spiritual community that attracted young college students from all over Europe, many of whom were caught up in Existential philosophy and were desperately searching for some meaning in life.

In the years that followed, as he worked with these young people, Francis developed and fine-tuned his arguments against Humanism. He did the same with his arguments in defense of the Christian faith. His lectures were recorded, and then the recordings were transcribed into books that began to be published in 1968. The books resulted in invitations to speak at universities around the world.

## **Schaeffer’s Overview**

In 1974, Schaeffer began work on a book and a ten part film that would bring him to widespread attention among American Evangelicals. The project was called *How Should We Then Live?* It was an in-depth study of the rise and decline of Western thought and culture, presented from a Christian worldview.

Beginning with the Roman Empire, Schaeffer explained how a Humanist belief in Man led to a society devoid of any standard of right and wrong, resulting in a moral rotteness that ultimately destroyed the Empire from within.

During the Middle Ages (500 to 1500 AD), the theology of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274) resulted in the distortion of Christianity because he argued that the Fall of Man had only corrupted Mankind’s will, but not his intellect. Therefore, truth could be perceived through reason, and the Church began to mix Scripture with the ideas of non-Christian philosophers like Aristotle. Increasingly, Man became the center of religion and the decisions of the Pope and Church Councils began to replace the

---

authority of the Scriptures.

The Renaissance (1300 to 1700) propelled Humanism to the center of all intellectual activity, including the arts. This movement began in southern Europe, focused in Italy, and gradually spread to all the continent. It served as a bridge from the Middle Ages to modern history. Man was placed at the center of all things and was glorified in the arts — as with Michelangelo’s statue titled *David*. Concerning this artistic masterpiece, Schaeffer observed:

Michelangelo took a piece of marble so flawed that no one thought it could be used, and out of it he carved this overwhelming statute. But let us notice that the *David* was not the Jewish David of the Bible. *David* was simply a title. Michelangelo knew his Judaism, and in the statue the figure is not circumcised. We are not to think of this as the biblical David but as the humanistic ideal. Man is great!

But in northern Europe there was a retreat from Humanism that was motivated by the Reformation that began in 1517. God and His Word were propelled back into the center of the Church and society. Once again, Man’s fallenness was recognized, but at the same time, there was a renewed emphasis on the dignity of Man as created in the image of God.

Schaeffer pointed out that both the Renaissance and the Reformation produced greater freedom for people, but whereas the Reformation led to responsible freedom, the Renaissance produced an irresponsible freedom of license because, being grounded in Humanism, there was no basis for morality.

This inherent problem with Humanism was demonstrated in the 18th Century in France with the rise of what came to be called, “The Enlightenment.” The French philosopher, Voltaire (1694-1778) argued for a society based on reason rather than faith or Catholic doctrines. Schaeffer observed: “To the Enlightenment thinkers, man and society were perfectible.” The French proclaimed the “Goddess of Reason” and committed themselves to a thoroughly secular society. The result was

---

the bloodbath of the French Revolution (1789-1799) which led to the authoritarian rule of Napoleon Bonaparte.

Meanwhile, a Scientific Revolution had started with the Polish astronomer, Copernicus (1473-1543) who formulated a model of the universe that placed the sun rather than the earth at the center of the universe.

Both the Renaissance and the Reformation helped to fuel the increasing emphasis on the scientific method — the Renaissance through its emphasis on reason and the Reformation through its insistence that we live in an ordered universe of natural laws created by God. Many of the leading scientists were Christians, including such people as Francis Bacon (1561-1626), Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), Isaac Newton (1643-1727), and Michael Faraday (1791-1867).

But this Christian base did not last long as Charles Darwin (1809-1882) and others like him with a Humanist worldview began to push God aside, elevate human reason and convert Mankind into an accident of evolution living in the midst of a meaningless universe.

All of which produced what Schaeffer called “The Age of Fragmentation,” when both philosophers and artists began to view life as an absurdity. All is chance. There is no purpose. Both the world and Man have become fragmented. There is no right or wrong. God is dead.

This radical shift in which all of God’s creation is viewed as nothing more than an accidental machine, including people, led to the horrors of the 20th Century: the Communist Revolution, the Nazi Holocaust, the Chinese Cultural Revolution and the Cambodian Genocide.

These atrocities illustrated a point Schaeffer made when he wrote: “If the unsaved man was consistent, he would be an atheist in religion, an irrationalist in philosophy...and completely amoral in the widest sense.” And so it came to be.

### **The American Application**

In both the ending of the book and the film, Schaeffer brought all this home to the United States in what he called “The Age of Personal Peace and Affluence.” By the time of the mid-20th Century the erosion



---

of a Christian consensus in America had produced a population where a majority of the people had adopted “two impoverished values — personal peace and affluence.” He explained his observation as follows:

Personal peace means just to be left alone, not to be troubled by the troubles of other people ... Personal peace means wanting to have my personal life pattern undisturbed in my lifetime, regardless of what the result will be in the lifetimes of my children and grandchildren. Affluence means an overwhelming and ever increasing prosperity — a life made up of things, things and more things — a success judged by an ever-higher level of material abundance.

According to Schaeffer, these two predominant post-war secular values produced the cultural revolt of the 1960s, as young people decided there must be more to life than selfishness and greed. As Schaeffer put it, “They were right in their analysis of the problem, but they were mistaken in their solutions” — mainly Hedonism as expressed in drugs and sex.

Schaeffer concluded by speaking prophetically about our society. He said, “As the memory of the Christian consensus which gave us freedom within the biblical form increasingly is forgotten, a manipulating authoritarianism will tend to fill the vacuum.” Specifically, he warned of rule by an arbitrary elite with arbitrary values.

He also warned of three future dangers:

1. Genetic tinkering with human beings.
2. Manipulation by the media, particularly television.
3. Reliance on sociological law — that is, law not based on the Bible or Natural Law or the Constitution, but law based on shifting public opinion.

The final statement in his book was an ominous one: “This book is written in the hope that this generation may turn from that greatest wickedness, the placing of any created thing in the place of the Creator, and that this generation may get its feet out of the paths of death and may live.”



---

The book, *How Should We Then Live?* was published in 1976. The film based on the book was released in 1977. Seminars featuring the film were held all across America in 1977 and 1978. In October of 1978 Schaeffer was diagnosed with lymphoma cancer, and he began treatments at the Mayo Clinic in Rochester, Minnesota.

### **His Collaboration with Koop**

Meanwhile, he continued working on a new book and film in collaboration with his old friend, Dr. C. Everett Koop (1916-2013). Later, in 1982 Dr. Koop became President Reagan's Surgeon General. This new book was titled, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* Both the book and the film were released in 1979.

The book began with a powerful dedication that read: "To those who were robbed of life, the unborn, the weak, the sick, the old, during the dark ages of madness, selfishness, lust and greed for which the last decades of the twentieth century are remembered." This book and film focused on the abominations of abortion, infanticide and euthanasia, as practiced in America at that time.

The first sentence in the book summed up its thesis: "Cultures can be judged in many ways, but eventually every nation in every age must be judged by this test: *how did it treat people?*" The authors continued with this observation: "The reason we are writing this book is that we feel strongly that we stand today on the edge of a great abyss." They then zeroed-in on the reason for this crisis:

The Christian consensus held that neither the majority nor an elite is absolute. God gives standards of value, and His absolutes are binding on both the ordinary person and those in all places of authority ... because the Christian consensus has been put aside, we are faced today with a flood of personal cruelty.

The book proceeds to present a passionate, logical and biblical case against abortion, with the warning that it will lead to the acceptance of both infanticide and euthanasia. In the process, they provide many horrifying examples of the practice of infanticide and euthanasia among the

---

medical profession, although neither was legal at that time.

They point out how we as a nation are being reconditioned in our thinking to accept infanticide. After all, what is the difference in killing a baby a few minutes before birth or a few minutes after? Both are murder. And if parents can pay to have their children killed, what is going to prevent children from paying to have their parents killed? “Within [the Humanist] worldview there is no room for believing that a human being has any final distinct value above that of an animal or of nonliving matter. People are merely a different arrangement of molecules.”

With the publication of this book, Schaeffer crossed the line between the realm of philosophy and theology into the world of social action. He and Koop concluded the book with detailed instructions about what people can do to support the sanctity of life and to vigorously oppose abortion, infanticide and euthanasia.

### **Schaeffer’s Manifesto**

Despite his ongoing treatment for cancer, Schaeffer continued to write. In 1981 he published *A Christian Manifesto*. It was very specifically aimed at the American landscape and the political developments that seemed to be leading the nation toward destruction. Basically, it dealt with the question of “what is the Christian’s responsibility to government, law and civil disobedience?”

The book was written in direct response to the *Communist Manifesto* of 1848, the *Humanist Manifesto I* of 1933 and the *Humanist Manifesto II* of 1973 — all of which placed Man at the center of all things and made him the measure of all things. In contrast, Schaeffer affirmed the biblical view of Man made in the image of God with “real humanness.”

Schaeffer showed how our nation was originally based upon a Christian consensus that recognized the dignity of Man and the sanctity of life, while realizing that Man is fallen and therefore must be restrained through a government of checks and balances and separation of powers.

He then proceeded to show that the foundations of our legal and governmental systems have eroded to the point where “secularized, so-

---

ciological law” now reigns supreme. Regarding this point, he referenced a statement by the former Chief Justice of the Supreme Court, Frederick Vinson (1890-1953) who wrote: “Nothing is more certain in modern society than the principle that there are no absolutes.”

Schaeffer explained that “sociological law” — or what could be called “situational law” — is operational when the courts make decisions that are divorced from a standard like biblical or constitutional principles. Instead, the courts base their decisions on what is thought to be best for society.

As an example Schaeffer pointed to the Supreme Court’s abortion decision in 1973. He asserted that it was a classic example of highly subjective legal decision making. It was a totally arbitrary decision forced upon the majority by an elite without any constitutional basis and in complete contradiction of God’s Word. (The same, of course could be said of the Court’s equally arbitrary ruling in the same-sex marriage case 43 years later in 2015.)

Schaeffer launched into a detailed discussion of the relationship of Christians to their government. He affirmed the biblical teaching that we are to respect and obey our rulers. But he hastened to emphasize that there are biblical limits to obedience. “The bottom line,” he asserted, “is that at a certain point there is not only the right, but the duty, to disobey the state.” And when is that? “Any government that commands what contradicts God’s Law abrogates its authority.”

Schaeffer concluded his manifesto by pointing out that Humanism is “an exclusivist, closed system which shuts out all contending viewpoints — especially if those views teach anything other than relative values and standards ... As a result, the humanistic, material-energy, chance world view is completely intolerant ... ” He therefore concludes:

It is not too strong to say that we are at war, and there are no neutral parties in the struggle. One either confesses that God is the final authority, or one confesses that Caesar is Lord.

One very fascinating thing about Schaeffer’s manifesto is what he

---

had to say about the presidential election of 1980 in which Ronald Reagan was triumphant. Writing in 1981 during the first year of Reagan's presidency, he refers to it as "a unique open window" for our nation to roll back the tide of Humanism. He warned that "we must beware of letting a foolish triumphalism cause us to think that all is now won and certain," because the Humanists "are deeply entrenched."

Speaking prophetically, Schaeffer then concluded that if we were unable to stem the tide of Humanism during the Reagan open window, it would most likely continue to be advanced in the future through the courts. "Under the guise of 'civil liberties' ... the Humanist forces have used the courts rather than the legislatures because the courts are not subject to the people's thinking and expression by the election process — and especially they (the courts) are not subject to re-election." And so it has been.

### **The Last Book**

Schaeffer concluded his life's work the way he began it, by condemning the Church for its apostasy. His message was contained in a book published in 1984, three months before his death. The book was titled, *The Great Evangelical Disaster*.

In 1948, as he and his wife were preparing to move to Europe, Schaeffer had written an essay titled, "Revolutionary Christianity," in which he argued that the true revolutionary version of Christianity was not the popular "socialized gospel" of that day, but the "historic, Bible-believing Christianity that believes the task of the Church is to preach Christ and Him crucified and that men are justified by faith."

He renewed this theme in his last book. He asserted that just as the mainline denominations had been corrupted in the 1920s and 1930s by their abandonment of Scripture, the same thing was occurring in the 1970s and 1980s among Evangelicals.

He proclaimed that "the great evangelical disaster" was "the failure of the evangelical world to stand for truth as truth." And then he bluntly stated, "There is only one word for this — namely, accommodation: the

---

evangelical church has accommodated to the world spirit of the age.”

How exactly? In two ways. First, Schaeffer identified the accommodation on Scripture, “so that many who call themselves Evangelicals hold a weakened view of the Bible and no longer affirm the truth of all the Bible teaches — truth not only in religious matters but in the areas of science and history and morality.” The second area has been on moral issues, “with no clear stand being taken even on matters of life and death.”

Schaeffer strongly castigated Evangelical leaders for waffling on the issue of the inerrancy of the Scriptures, “so that the full authority of Scripture is completely undercut.” Here’s how he summarized the issue:

Unless the Bible is without error, not only when it speaks of salvation matters, but also when it speaks of history and the cosmos, we have no foundation for answering questions concerning the existence of the universe and its form and the uniqueness of man. Nor do we have any moral absolutes, or certainty of salvation, and the next generation of Christians will have nothing on which to stand.

When the book was published, many responded by declaring that Schaeffer had “overstated his case,” but looking back at it today, some 30 years later, it is obvious that his observations were right on the mark. For today, we have Evangelical leaders who are literally denying many of the fundamentals of the faith.

Schaeffer was so disgusted with the Evangelical Movement that he declared he would no longer refer to himself as an Evangelical. Instead, he would call himself “a Bible-believing Christian.”

## **Conclusion**

Francis Schaeffer was graduated to his eternal reward on May 15, 1984, at his home in Rochester, Minnesota. He was 72 years old.

The day before he died, he prayed, “Dear Father God, I have finished my work. Please take me home. I am tired.”



**Great Commission Center International**