

Editorial: The Impact of Francis Schaeffer: Faith, Hope, and Love

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In this issue of the journal we reflect upon the legacy of Francis Schaeffer. Schaeffer has had a massive influence upon evangelicalism, an influence that lives on in our day. When I think of Schaeffer, the three virtues of faith, hope, and love come to mind. I am using the word “faith” here to mean adherence to truth, his devotion to Christian doctrine, and his unflinching defense of the inerrancy of Scripture. Schaeffer was passionate about the truth of the gospel. He spoke and wrote about “true truth” in an age when relativism was polluting the intellectual climate. Nor did Schaeffer restrict truth to the “spiritual” sphere. The truth of the gospel spoke to every arena of life, including philosophy, music, art, and homemaking. For Schaeffer Christ was not only Lord of the heart but also Lord of the mind. He encouraged Christians to enter the intellectual sphere with confidence and to take every thought captive to Christ. Schaeffer’s intellectual work has been criticized as simplistic and even mistaken in some areas. It is acknowledged by all that Schaeffer was a generalist, and hence he inevitably misconstrued some of the details. But we must beware of diminishing his brilliance as a thinker. He got the big picture right, brilliantly right, and he was able to communicate this picture in a way his contemporaries could understand. Specialists may correct Schaeffer here or there, but many specialists lack the ability to see the whole. They are weak precisely where Schaeffer was strong.

Schaeffer was also a man who loved.

He loved people in the particulars of every day life. He made time to meet with and to minister to people. The Schaeffers opened up their home to all the problems and inconveniences and messes that come from loving human beings. Francis Schaeffer showed his love by *listening* to what others had to say before responding. People were open to Schaeffer’s answers because they knew that he heard their questions. It is fitting that we run his sermon “No Little People” in this journal, for Schaeffer lived out the truth that there are no little people in God’s sight.

Schaeffer also lived in hope. He believed that God could turn our society away from its destructive and despairing ways. The God who reigned over all of life is not silent, but is active and working. Schaeffer was an indefatigable worker because he trusted in the sovereignty of God.

I want to share a letter from James Montgomery Boice, the late pastor of Tenth Presbyterian Church in Philadelphia. Boice wrote this letter on May 31, 1984, after he had heard of Dr. Schaeffer’s death. It expresses well the contribution Schaeffer made.

When I returned home to Philadelphia the Sunday following news of Francis’ death, I expressed my appreciation for him in a number of areas. First, I have been deeply appreciative of his creativity, particularly in his use of words. We live in an age when so many evangelicals merely mouth platitudes or copy one another. Francis was not like that. He always thought through

issues himself and then presented imaginative approaches to them in language which was memorable. His classic expressions have already found their way into the spiritual vocabulary of the modern church. Second, I appreciated his ability to synthesize. We live in an era of specialization. Francis knew many subjects deeply, but he had unusual ability to draw all these disparate elements together under a common umbrella and thus make sense of data for many puzzled Christians. Third, he was critical. I think of his criticism in the best sense, not merely of other people but also of his own life and traditions, so that he seemed always constantly to be learning from and trying to avoid the mistakes of the past. In the last years I particularly valued his critique of modern evangelicalism which I heartily endorse. His criticism of evangelicals as constantly accommodating to the spirit of the times is one we all need to hear and about which we need to repent.

Finally I was impressed in the conversations I had with him with his sense of urgency. Knowing he had cancer, he was particularly alert to the truth that time is not unlimited where we are concerned and that the use of the time we have been given is of crucial importance. Francis was a great blessing to me, as I know he was to many other thousands of people.

It is my prayer that the legacy of Francis Schaeffer will encourage us in faith, hope, and love. In this issue Steve Wellum provides an excellent introduction to Schaeffer's thought. The well-known evangelical theologian and cultural critic, Harold O. J. Brown, compares Schaeffer to other thinkers who have shaped our world. Udo Middelman, one of Schaeffer's sons in law, helps us think about the impact of his father-in-law. Greg Grooms of Probe Ministries also reflects on Schaeffer's influence in his own life and the message Schaeffer has for today. As mentioned above, we have included

Schaeffer's sermon, "No Little People, No Little Places." In a day when many in the church equate "bigger" with "better," this sermon is perhaps more timely than when Schaeffer first delivered it. Readers will not want to miss our forum where stimulating interaction with other dimensions of Schaeffer's thought is included. May the mantle of Francis Schaeffer fall upon many in our generation so that we can faithfully proclaim the gospel to our generation.