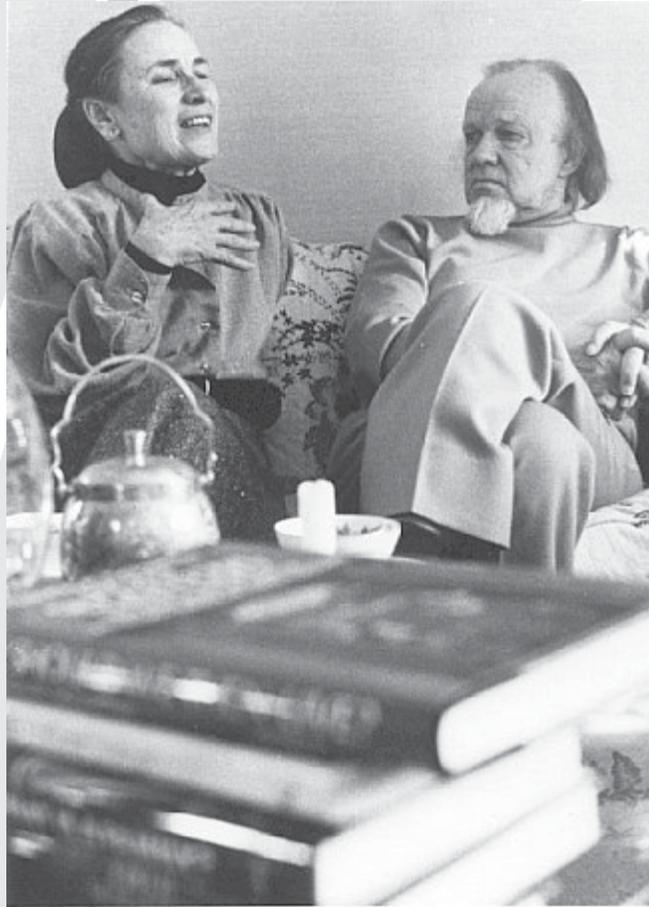


# L'Abri

INTERNATIONAL



**At the risk of some oversimplification, Francis Schaeffer's vision can be expressed in two basic, fundamental concerns: *true truth* and *true spirituality*. A brief overview of his legacy in the United States and Europe reveals not only certain problems but the continuing relevance of this vision today.**

Born in the German town section of Philadelphia in 1912, as a young man he came into contact with the Christian faith in an almost unique way. During his late teens he was reading classical philosophy. This showed him two things: that he

## Learning from Francis Schaeffer

### The Legacy and Relevance of His Vision

Ronald Macaulay

had found the field of interest in which he felt most at home – the field of ideas – and that while philosophy dealt with what he would later call the “basic philosophical questions,” it had no answers. Plenty of questions, in other words, but no answers!

Then he found the Bible, or rather the Bible found him! He read alternately from the classical philosophers and from the Old Testament, the latter steadily displacing the former as he went along. “Before I left Genesis 3,” he once told me, “I knew that this book had the answers to what

the philosophers were asking.” Simply through his reading of Scripture he was born again. No one on the outside was helping. “Before I reached the New Testament I was virtually a believer in Christ,” he said. Not surprisingly his life began to move in an entirely different direction.

#### True Truth

From the very beginning, then, Schaeffer had a mind for what he called *true truth*. He loved the Bible and its message of salvation first and foremost

Dear Friends,

*In this second issue of the digital L'Abri International Newsletter, we are pleased to present a recent article by Randal Macaulay on the legacy of Francis Schaeffer's vision. After reviewing the impact of Schaeffer's commitment of truth and spirituality in the USA and the UK, Randal explores the continued relevance of this vision for our culture today. Randal is a L'Abri Member working at Christian Heritage in Cambridge, UK ([www.christianheritageuk.org.uk](http://www.christianheritageuk.org.uk)), a center dedicated to preserving the lessons of history for wise Christian involvement in present-day issues.*

*After reading the article you may be curious what is happening right now in the various L'Abri branches around the world. Back on the homepage ([www.labri.org](http://www.labri.org)) just click on the link to any of the 8 branches to find current lecture schedules and the most recent prayer letters. If you have any questions for the workers at a specific branch, please do not hesitate to send them a quick email!*

*Also notice the upcoming conference in Rosewood, California at the end of July. If you cannot make it out West at that time, all the lectures and workshops will as always be recorded and available later for purchase. Simply visit the L'Abri Conferences section of the website of Sound Word Associates. ([www.soundword.com](http://www.soundword.com)).*

*Again, if you have any questions about, comments on or tips for this newsletter, feel free to contact the editors at [labri@labri.nl](mailto:labri@labri.nl). We look forward to hearing from you!*

Blessings,  
The L'Abri Workers

because it accurately reflects the reality within which all human beings find themselves – and against which, ultimately, they cannot revolt, try as they may. The corollary of this point was a sense of inescapable responsibility to unmask falsehood. Other religious and philosophical worldviews are basically all “lies” or distortions of the truth, as much in relation to the created order as in relation to God's acts of salvation through history.

So Schaeffer's approach to “apologetics” was already very “presuppositional” from the start. Begin with the Christian worldview and everything in reality makes sense; start elsewhere and nothing does! Without recourse to Van Til or Dooyeweerd, Schaeffer had discovered the ground-motif of Scripture they shared, namely the Reformed perspective. He also agreed with their critique of “evidentialism” but carefully distinguished himself from them over its practical implications.

Human beings could be reasoned with intellectually, he argued, not because they share a common presupposition with the Bible – because they do not – but because they are unavoidably creatures of the one true God. Surrounded by evidences of God's creation and actions in the real world – what he called the mannishness of man and the form of the universe – they inevitably stand on common ground with the Bible, though inconsistently within their alternative intellectual frameworks.

### L'Abri

Schaeffer's experiences after moving to Europe in 1948 merely reinforced these convictions. The hollowness of life based on modernist presuppositions had already been expressed in the existentialist philosophy of men like Sartre and Camus, and their intellectual capitulation was quickly echoed and enlarged by the 1960's hippie revolution. Europe was never the same again. In such a context, what Schaeffer found he could

do, always with great sympathy and gentleness, was to apply these theological convictions to the “pulling down of strongholds” (1 Corinthians 10:4). He relentlessly exposed the inadequacies of all non-biblical thinking and tried to lead men and women to Christ.

This approach was already strikingly different from the run-of-the-mill

*Begin with the  
Christian worldview,  
and everything  
makes sense; start  
elsewhere, and  
nothing does!*

evangelicalism and evangelism then current. But what made it truly outstanding was the fact that Schaeffer carried on this ministry within the context of a highly personal and non-exploitative environment – the setting of L'Abri, a French word meaning *the Shelter*. At great personal cost to himself, his wife and family, a constant stream of individuals made their way to the Schaeffer's home in the Swiss Alps. This slowly developed into a larger community and study centre, the first of eight such L'Abris now scattered around the globe.

### True Spirituality

The reality behind this brings us to the second of Schaeffer's prime convictions, *true spirituality*. In a sense, what happened to the Schaeffers in the second part of their lives involved a type of “burial” along the lines of what Jesus said about the seed: if it is to bear real fruit, it must fall into the ground and die (John 12).

Something of this nature happened to them under God's supernatural leading. The Schaeffers deliberately turned away from the organisational razzamatazz they had been accustomed to in the States and began to “live by faith,” which meant



making prayer the centre of L'Abri's "methodology" instead of programmes or advertising gimmicks. Edith Schaeffer's *The L'Abri Story* describes what happened.

In hindsight, of course, one is able to see the extraordinary providence in all these developments. For what looked at the time bizarre and inefficient turned out to be just the sort of environment in which the pointlessness and inauthenticity of postmodern experience could best be challenged – a family, a small community in which the individual is supremely valued. This dual thrust of Schaeffer's work was necessary then and is all the more necessary now: modernism needs to be challenged intellectually and postmodernism needs to be shown something "real".

Schaeffer was able to combine both within L'Abri, hence the relevance of Schaeffer's second abiding concern. God has called us, he would say, not to programmes and the imitation of the mechanical, but to personal experience and the imitation of Christ. Whatever sphere of life one is called to, Christianity has to be a moment-by-moment experience of the living Christ. Hence the importance for him of prayer and being led by the Spirit, of knowing both weakness because of sacrifice and

frustration because of the severities of the battle.

### Legacy

What remains to be asked, of course, is how much this or any of Schaeffer's many concerns actually got across to the wider church. The answer to that question is complicated.

Many individuals were deeply affected by his message about True Spirituality, and their lives changed as a result. But in the States at least, what attracted the majority were his ventures into the apologetic arena, not his teaching on the Christian life. Undoubtedly he helped to strengthen the intellectual convictions of many. This, in turn, enabled a new level of engagement academically and politically, for all of which he deserves our thanks and respect to this day.

But the church at large, even as it eulogised him, in fact ignored his emphasis on spirituality. So radical was it, that it remained practically invisible and unintelligible. In large measure this helps to explain why Schaeffer's later and much misunderstood emphasis on social concerns, particularly his passionate loathing of abortion, were less carefully applied and nuanced than he himself would have wanted. For example, he repeatedly warned against the dangers of "wrapping Christianity in the American flag."

But his warnings went unheeded by many. The result was that the larger community quickly identified him with what evangelicalism at large was doing politically and dismissed him along with the rest as a right-wing fundamentalist, which he most certainly was not. What he was doing, in fact, was applying another of his famous dicta: "the Lordship of Christ over the whole of life." Christianity, in other words, is not "churchianity" – worship, evangelism, prayer meetings, etc., as good as these things are – but *reality*. Christians are, therefore, called to be seriously engaged within all arenas of public life, such as business, culture, education, politics, etc.

### Virus of Technique

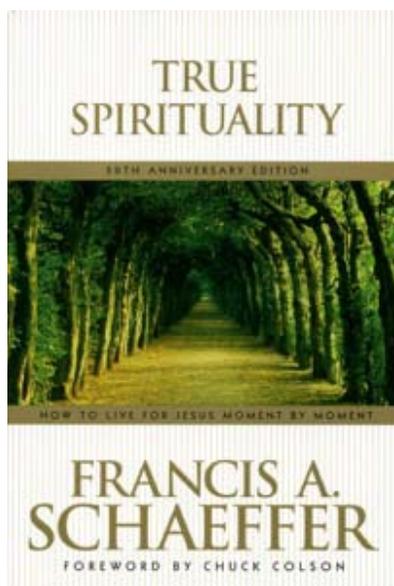
Schaeffer's acceptance in American evangelicalism was thus both widespread and influential, though complicated. When he insisted on the development and application of the Christian mind he was well received, and the church inestimably strengthened as a result. But things would have been better had his spiritual challenge been more widely understood.

Instead, what I call the "virus of technique" continued to be the church's default mode across the board. Mega-churches proliferated and marketing techniques were enthusiastically applied. But neither was to the church's advantage, as writers such as David Wells

*What made the ministry of Schaeffer truly outstanding was context: the highly personal and non-exploitative environment of L'Abri*

and Os Guinness have documented, and as Willow Creek's Bill Hybels has recently remarked concerning the vulnerabilities of the "seeker sensitive" church growth model.

British evangelicalism by contrast managed to marginalise Schaeffer completely. His biblical challenge to the idiosyncratic traditions of its varied constituencies was too threatening. Rather than let him prevail, they chose to ignore him. The scientists found fault with his insistence on a real Adam and Eve and a literal "fall". The preachers



found his emphasis on discussion and persuasion too intellectual and therefore not sufficiently “spiritual”. The medics took umbrage at his “hard-line” position on abortion and infanticide. Church leaders wondered what good could come out of “culture,” and the Anglicans

*The dual thrust of Schaeffer’s work is all the more necessary now: modernism needs to be challenged intellectually and postmodernism needs to be shown something real*

in general, of course, disliked talk of “pure” and “impure” churches. As a result, Schaeffer is still a household name in evangelical circles in the USA while being almost unknown in the UK.

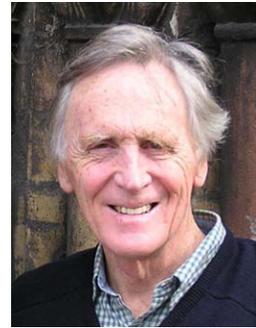
### Relevance

Nevertheless, Schaeffer’s influence continues to reach around the globe. His books sell widely, as do the documentaries he made on history and ethics, and the writings of his wife, Edith, who is still alive. Younger leaders in South America and Asia are discovering Schaeffer’s prophetic insights and finding them just what they need at the start of the 21st century.

In addition, L’Abri continues to exist and to flourish, though never, given its unusual calling, without difficulty and a

certain “hiddenness” to the world at large. That, too, testifies to what he achieved. No greater testimony exists, however, concerning the reliability of his fundamental concerns, than his continuing relevance. This is the more remarkable given the phenomenal rate of change over the past half-century. The continuing “fragmentation,” as Schaeffer called it, of Western society in fact increases our respect. Did he not predict this very thing almost 50 years ago?

Certainly then, without idolizing the Schaeffers – something they themselves always resisted – there is much fruit yet to be harvested from the legacy L’Abri is carrying. We pray and long for that. May God bless the faithfulness of Christians everywhere to the enduring reality and importance of true truth and true spirituality.



*Having worked in the English and Swiss branches for several years, Randal Macaulay remains a L’Abri member and now maintains the vision of Schaeffer’s work at Christian Heritage in Cambridge, England. His seminar “Rekindling the Vision” explores lessons from history for the present needs of the church. Those in the USA and UK interested in attending or organizing such a seminar should feel free to contact him through the site, [www.christianheritageuk.org.uk](http://www.christianheritageuk.org.uk) .*

**L’Abri Conference California 2008**  
THINKING AND LIVING THE WAY OF CHRIST

July 31 through August 3

VALLEY SPRINGS PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH • ROSEVILLE, CALIFORNIA  
[www.labri-california.org](http://www.labri-california.org)

# To the Praying Family ...

Dear Friends of L'Abri and visitors to the L'Abri website,

*In keeping with the new pattern of this Family Letter, we will be bringing you a quick update from two of the current L'Abri branches - Southborough and Greatham. First some comments from Dick Keyes, taken from the last Southborough newsletter:*

"In preparing the Southborough report for our annual Members Meetings it struck me that it was a great wonder that all the L'Abri communities exist at all. The heyday of communities in the recent past was from 1966 to 1973, during which time over ten million Americans lived in some kind of intentional community. Almost all of these communities collapsed by 1975. The collapse was not because they were no longer needed, it was because they didn't work ... So my question is, how and why in the world is L'Abri still here, actually growing and thriving? The short answer would be 'with the help of God,' and although that is completely true it might be heard as no more than a cliché. The real answer is still a great wonder to me, but I do have some scattered thoughts.

As we spoke at the meeting, it seemed that 'community' had been a major topic of discussion among students at several of the other L'Abri branches. This is precisely because our students have experienced such isolation and loneliness, with social forces pushing them toward high mobility, disconnection, competitiveness, speed, money, performance and being measured by surfaces. All the while the institutions which had provided strength and support for the individual's stability and growth – local community, family and church – are themselves profoundly weakened by the same fragmenting forces of modernity. Virtual communities on the internet, though sometimes better than nothing, seem to call attention to the problem of loneliness more than to be any solution to it. You could well argue that the need for real life communities of all different sorts is greater now than in the '70s.

The Schaeffers started L'Abri as a way to honor God that he might use their work to demonstrate his reality into the world. That meant that the community was for God. It was not community substituting for God, as if to compensate for his supposed irrelevance or departure. Nor was it a community in which 'being in community' was an end in itself. Community had a purpose beyond itself, to be a temporary shelter of hospitality and learning for all whom God might bring to the door. It also meant that there was no demand for it to be a utopian community, to teach the world the ideal way to live. In fact L'Abri has always been passionately anti-utopian. With all our best intentions, we must still live well within the darkness of the shadow of the Fall. As a result, utopias have always backfired, demanding the best, throwing away what is good, but ending up with what is worse.

L'Abri has lasted because God has responded to our prayers for workers and helpers, for students and for God's vision for each next step of the work. He has also heard our prayers for finances and he has moved many, many, people to a generosity without which we might at any time in our history have collapsed within a few weeks. L'Abri is not still here because it is some fixed institution, as if a part of the landscape. Its survival and flourishing in the midst of such vulnerability and insecurity is still a great marvel and a reason to thank God for his grace."

*Dick goes on to report that 2008 has been busy in Southborough, where Ben and Nickaela Keyes are back working full-time after the arrival of their twin daughters, Eleanor and Abigail. Pray for them to find strength and rest as they make this adjustment. In the Morrell household, Joe and Sue ask for prayer regarding Nate's first experience of summer camp and Luke's transition to high school this fall. Mardi Keyes gives thanks for an improvement in her ongoing battle against allergies and asks for your prayers that this would continue. In general the branch would appreciate your prayers for God to provide good, capable helpers, and for financial provision in a troubled economy.*

*Overseas in Greatham, England, workers Stefan and Lindholm joyfully welcomed their first child, daughter Linnea. Pray for a healthy start and good adjustments back into the work schedule. Jim and Merran Paul also ask for prayer as they continue to find a balance between work commitments and raising a family. Edith Reitsema and Marta Hegedus would appreciate prayer for the special priveleges and pressures of being single workers among the students. Though the move back to Greatham is finished, Doug and Maggie Curry are still adjusting to the transition and would especially value prayer for their children who are still in school in Canada. Andrew and Helen Fellows ask as always that you would pray for wisdom for their leadership and the ability to follow God's leading in all L'Abri's responsibilities both within and outside the branch.*

*Again we want to thank all of you again for your prayer and support. Please remember to contact any of the branches at any time with your questions or just to say hi. We'd love to hear from you!*

*For all the workers,  
Robb Ludwick, Dutch L'Abri*

