

Dr. Francis Schaeffer Theologian of the Antithesis

Dr. Francis Schaeffer, founder of the L'Abri Fellowship, author of at least 22 books, theologian, philosopher, lecturer and evangelist has gone to be with his Lord, whom he served so faithfully. We will miss him, his prodding to greater efforts in Christian scholarship, his courageous stand for truth and absolute moral norms in a rapidly declining Western civilization. His emphasis on two orthodoxies will not be forgotten. He repeatedly stated that we need two orthodoxies; first, an orthodoxy of doctrine, and, second, an orthodoxy of community. The world should be able to see our love for truth and our love for one another.

I thank God for Dr. Schaeffer's ministry 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 *How Then Should We Live?* in a Toronto church. And some years ago, I spent three weeks at the Dutch L'Abri. The fellowship at that place was great and stimulating. On the way to the Philippines, in 1977, our family spent four weeks traveling through Holland, Belgium, Luxembourg and Germany. Our weekends were spent at the Dutch L'Abri so that we could attend its bilingual (Dutch-English) church services. We also had the opportunity to talk with L'Abri workers and guests.

Dr. Schaeffer was a theologian of the antithesis. His system of thought cannot be understood apart from this concept which he stressed throughout his books, films and lectures. The word antithesis refers to two entities, movements or principles that are set over against each other. If a statement is true, the opposite of the statement cannot be true. We live in a world of opposites. There is light and darkness. There are children of Christ and children of satan. These entities are always in conflict.

The antithesis principle involves the notion that there are Biblical absolutes in every area of thought and life. God's Word is true. The verbalized communication from God to man in the Bible is infallible, inerrant. We must not compromise our view of Scripture. The Bible is without error not only when it speaks of values and faith, religious things, but it is also without error when it speaks of history and the cosmos. A non-Christian must be shown that his basic thinking is in contradiction to the truth. Dr. Schaeffer called for a return to the logic of the antithesis as the only way out of our modern predicament. He went so far as to say that if we let go of our sense of antithesis, we have nothing to say. Dr. Schaeffer viewed the principle of antithesis as a basic theme in Scripture. "Christianity turns upon antithesis," he wrote, "not as some abstract sense of truth, but in the fact that God exists, and in personal justification." The Biblical concept of justification is a total personal antithesis.

Before his justification, man is dead in sin. He is in the kingdom of darkness. The moment he accepts Christ, he changes from death to life. But this antithesis also works its ways through all of life. There is no neutrality possible. A man is either for or against God who is there and who speaks. In life the whole of God's truth must be interrelated in all its parts and aspects. Christianity is not just for home or church. It is for all of life.

Through Dr. Schaeffer's ministry many evangelicals were awakened to the fact that Christianity means something for culture, politics and the arts. Art is not just for evangelical propaganda. A Christian can do art for art's sake, and to the glory of God. In politics a Christian, world and life view determines the decision making process that influences the life of a nation. Dr. Schaeffer claimed that his antithetical theme was squarely based on the Bible. One of his critics, Dr. Jack Rogers, associate professor of philosophy religion and theology, who holds his doctorate in theology from the Free' University of Amsterdam, wrote two major articles in the Reformed Journal opposing Dr. Schaeffer's apologetic method and view of Scripture. He claimed that Dr. Schaeffer's antithetical method was a repetition of the post-Reformation scholastic system of Francis Turretin, as adopted and developed in the Old Princeton Theology of Hodge, Warfield and Machen.

Where does the antithesis: concept come from? The term came into prominence with the so-called, neo-calvinism that arose in the Netherlands during the last half of the 18th century. Guillaume Groen Van Prinsterer and Abraham Kuyper popularized the term. These scholars firmly believed that the antithesis is not man-made but a fact that God Himself had laid down in His Word. A fact that throughout the ages has been recognized and which every Christian knows in his own heart. No one can read the Bible, even superficially, without concluding that there is a division. Mankind is split into two groups. There are those who belong to God, and those who belong to the Prince of Darkness. And this antithesis has always been a force to be reckoned with.

Abraham Kuyper called it the great gap between modernism and the Christian world and life view. This antithetical view influences every area of life, including politics and science. We don't talk about a conflict of doctrine, but about a conflict of faith vs. unbelief, between opposing world and life views, Dr. J. Waterink wrote that Christianity stands antithetically over against other norm structures. When Christianity came with the declaration that the Truth, that the Bible itself, is a revelation of God and that God's revelation in Jesus Christ became flesh, the antithesis became absolutized for Christians. Whoever opposes God's revelation is not in the Truth. The revelation of God gives norms to all of life. Dr. G. Brillenburg Wurth stressed that also in evangelism we must acknowledge the antithesis as our point of departure. He wrote that the antithesis stands between God's kingdom and the world. Evangelism is not only to save souls, but it is also the struggle for the kingdom of God against the power of darkness in this world.

Dr. Henry Van Til, an American Calvinist clearly outlined the antithesis principle in his book *The Calvinist Concept of Culture*. He said that we are all culture builders. And this activity is either a demonstration of faith or of apostasy. We have either a God glorifying or a God defying culture. We are in the world, not of the world. We cannot have a true communion with the godless, apostatizing culture of our day, although we must associate with the men of this world.

Dr. Schaeffer's view on the antithesis was not novel. He was strongly influenced by Dr. A. Kuyper's thinking. In his book *Pollution and the Death of Man*, Dr. Schaeffer refers

to Kuyper's sphere sovereignty. And in line with Kuyper, Schaeffer said that Christians are to act like Christians in each sphere of life. A man is always subject to the norms of Scripture, whether in the classroom or at home. Dr. Schaeffer often acknowledged his indebtedness to the late Dr. Hans Rookmaaker, professor of art at the Free University of Amsterdam, and director of the Dutch L'Abri. Dr. Schaeffer met Rookmaaker while the latter was still a student. Dr. Schaeffer was a member of the Association for Calvinistic Philosophy. He was also influenced by Dr. Cornelius Van Til of Westminster Theological Seminary. He believed that each man has a presupposition, even if he does not know the word. Every man is a philosopher, as philosophy is a way of looking at life. In his personal evangelism, Dr. Schaeffer always tried to have a person admit what his presuppositions are. He then developed them logically until the person saw the contradiction in his conclusion.

Dr. Schaeffer was not always consequent in his methodology. In many instances, Dr. Schaeffer was not always careful as a scholar. His lines were too sweeping, the issues tackled perhaps too many. He was widely read, a skillful and patient conversationalist, a compassionate man with the heart of an evangelist. He was a prophet, used mightily by the Lord to bring men and women from all walks of life to the truth, to shake the evangelicals out of their complacency, and to awaken them to their cultural task.

Dr. Schaeffer said in one of his sermons that we will outlive the things we make. How true this is of himself. His life and accomplishments have carved their place in history. And to conclude with a Scripture verse, "And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yes, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them" (Rev. 14:13).

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