

“The Church Before the Watching World:” Francis Schaeffer’s Burdens

ANDREW FELLOWS

Andrew Fellows is a teacher and conference speaker, and the director of apologetics for Christian Heritage, Cambridge. After serving a term in the pastorate he spent twenty one years with his family in the English branch of L’Abri Fellowship and from 2011 to 2016 served as the Chairman of L’Abri International. Andrew has recently written *Smuggling Jesus Back Into the Church; How the Church Became Worldly and What to do About It* due for publication by IVP in early 2022. He has several other books in the pipeline written for skeptics. Andrew has a special interest in cultural apologetics.

In this article I am arguing for a retrieval and serious re-engagement with Francis Schaeffer’s message to the church. There is no doubting that Schaeffer left a considerable and enduring legacy—one I would argue is worthy of our attention today. For many he is best known for L’Abri, the community he founded in Switzerland with his wife Edith in 1955. Among its various purposes, this “shelter” served as a place of asylum for doubters who had questions the church failed to take seriously. Schaeffer also achieved notoriety for his work as an apologist to sceptics. Through his lectures, writings and documentary styled films he argued for the credibility of the faith, encouraging a generation of evangelicals to be confident in the truth. Others may remember him for bravely tackling the ethical issues of the day. His book entitled, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race* (later turned into a film) brought issues like abortion infanticide and euthanasia to the attention of Christians who otherwise would have remained oblivious to such matters. The component of Schaeffer’s legacy that is less appreciated was his burden for the church.

To get a sense of this concern, one only needs to peruse the body of his writings. In his collected works of five volumes, one exclusively addresses “The Christian View of the Church” (Volume 4). To read through the various books that make up this volume, Schaeffer’s message is not the musing of an armchair theologian discussing the finer points of ecclesiology and missiology. What strikes one immediately is the practical tenor of his communication reflecting the burden of a pastor. Of the many descriptions you could make of Schaeffer—apologist, public intellectual, cultural observer, and prophet—the designation “pastor” is the one that most aptly characterizes his calling. One just needs to read through his published letters to get a sense of this.

His commitment to the church goes back to his early years when he completed a theological training at Westminster Theological Seminary and Faith Seminary specifically to prepare for pastoral ministry. Following this he had pastorates in several churches in Pennsylvania, and then St. Louis. The shift in focus came in 1947 when he and Edith were commissioned by their denomination to go to Europe in order to help the European churches from north to south in the aftermath of the war. This led to the remarkable story of the provision of a property in Switzerland where they founded the first L’Abri community in 1955. What few know is that just prior to L’Abri they planted a church in Champéry, Switzerland reflecting his abiding commitment to the local church. It is also worth noting here that Schaeffer insisted every member in the L’Abri Fellowship must belong to a Bible-believing church.

Surveying Schaeffer’s deliberations on the church, the one thing that stands out was his burden that the church should be a credible witness. It was routine for him to connect the life of the church to “the watching world.” As a keen observer of culture, he was well aware of the challenge of this. Back in the 1980s when most evangelicals thought they were the majority, he could see that the reality was not what it appeared to be: “we live in a post-Christian world.”¹ Although he would have resisted the label of “prophet,” he was prescient in seeing the challenges that lay ahead—as if staring into the palantír in *Lord of the Rings* to foresee future events. He wrote of “future manipulations which will be so overwhelming in the days to come that they will make the battles of the last forty years look like kindergarten child’s play.”² From our vantage point, we can see how right he was with the testing’s we presently face. For instance, Schaeffer knew that when “truth retreats, tyranny advances,” and that of course is increasingly played

out in the geo-political sphere today with potentially dire consequences for the church. His concern in the face of such tests was to fortify the church for the storm that was coming, gently chiding evangelicals who had a tendency to “specialize in being behind.”³

It is salient that in view of what he saw coming he did not issue some kind of Benedictine call to retreat to the desert as some are doing today. For him, any battenning down of the hatches was unthinkable, and he had no time for the church in the ghetto. Why? Because at the core of our calling was the necessity of being the church before the watching world. However difficult, the church needed to be faithful to its calling because the world was looking on. People would or would not come to eternal life through the reality the church exhibited.

That is why for Schaeffer the church “should be a community which the world can look upon as a pilot plant,”⁴ showcasing the reality of what we have in Christ. “Unless they see that the thing that the humanists rightly want but cannot achieve on a humanist base (human communication and human relationship), is able to be practiced in our communities, then let me say it clearly: they will not listen and they should not listen.”⁵ It also accounts for why he was deeply committed to the principle of the purity of the visible church.⁶ In a moment where the cultural perception of the church is so negative, this is a discomfiting phrase. Under the judgment of a new moral order—the fulfilment of Schaeffer’s prediction of overwhelming *future manipulations*—the secular humanists view the church as the impure and immoral. In particular, they target this to our views on sexuality, marriage, gender and critical race theory. As these issues are increasingly politicized, so does the buffeting we experience. To the humanist any call to purity sounds like an endorsement of narrow-minded Christians who look back on the world with disgust thus enlarging the gulf between the church and the world.

For Schaeffer, the call to purity was linked to living out the reality of what the church already was—a supernatural life. This did not need inventing but was something in our possession and therefore to be lived out. The world had a right to judge whether we are Christians because of this supernatural life.⁷ If we lived out what it meant to be the bride of Christ, this would “bring the world to a standstill.”⁸ That is why the word burden gets to the core of what he had to say as burdens are rooted in reality and not high ideals—and Schaeffer was all about reality.

Hearing his burdens, it strikes one that there is nothing novel about them. For him, it was always staying true to our calling. One can hear the note of urgency in his message to the church. Much of this was because emerging trends deeply troubled him, and these have been born out into the 21st century. For that reason, I would argue that this part of his corpus continues to speak with vibrancy. His core communication to the church comprises four burdens—each as needful to hear today as when he addressed them in the final third of the 20th century.

SCHAEFFER'S FIRST BURDEN: THE CHURCH TO BE A REVOLUTION BUILT ON THE TRUTH

For Schaeffer, the church was nothing less than a revolutionary force in the world. He was careful to clarify that this was not primarily a political revolution. He wrote, "Christianity today is not conservative, but revolutionary. To be conservative today is to miss the whole point, for conservatism means standing in the flow of the *status quo*, and the *status quo* no longer belongs to us. Today we are a minority. If we want to be fair, we must teach the young to be revolutionaries, revolutionaries against the *status quo*."⁹ Where many like to trace his legacy to the conservative Moral Majority of the 1980s, this is striking and worth noting because today many evangelicals have reduced our engagement with the world to the "culture wars." While Schaeffer would have been interested in the issues that swirl around this, he was clear that the proper focus for the revolution lay elsewhere. He expressed this in *The Church at the End of the 20th Century* where he wrote of "a revolution built on truth."¹⁰ One cannot engage Schaeffer without an appreciation of his passion for truth. For him, this was something with a greater revolutionary force than politics could ever deliver.

In a moment when there is a great muddle about what truth is, Schaeffer was crystal clear. He even added the prefix "true" to truth to convey the force of this, i.e., "true truth." As he loved to say, "the final great concept of truth is that Christianity is true to what is there."¹¹ It committed him to a truth that was comprehensive enough to embrace the whole of reality. It was possible to apprehend such a truth because God had rendered it in the revelation of the Bible. There was no ambiguity for Schaeffer on the link between truth and revelation, which was why "Christianity should be true to the full inspiration of Scripture."¹²

Truth in such a comprehensive framework made Schaeffer instinctively push back on every reduction. He refused to allow it to become merely “religious,” i.e., a partial truth that was suitable to meet our spiritual needs. He had no time for such a diminution and steered clear of any religious God-talk that hinted at what he called the “upper story leap” into a mystical realm. If truth corresponded to what was really there, the church should use plain speech to give it expression. In a similar fashion he refused any notion of “psychological truth”—what we today might call “preferential truth,” i.e., something that is “true for me” because I feel it to be that way.

It was because the church possessed this truth that it could be a revolution in the world. Schaeffer’s commitment to Biblical revelation as the epistemological foundation for truth left him in no doubt that philosophy and science could not discover it comprehensively on their own foundations. He was keen that believers fully embraced their privileged position that “Christianity is true”—not with hubris but in humility and gratitude. So convinced was Schaeffer of “true truth” that he believed it to be the real revolution the world required—one that ultimately led to “all things holding together in Christ.”

One reason truth mattered so much to Schaeffer was because he could see that it was fast becoming a relic in Western culture. Long before we finally named our society “post truth,” Schaeffer saw what was happening. Tracing the history of Western philosophy, he could see the gradual waning of truth and the move to skepticism. For the church to have the truth in a cultural moment when it had declined was for Schaeffer an exceptional trust. So convinced was he of its revolutionary force he thought it possible for truth to bring the world to a standstill because it gave “all of life meaning in the present time, moment by moment.”¹³ It was because truth made sense of the world we live in that the church could say something “relevant to all segments of society.”¹⁴ The “relevant” church for Schaeffer had little to do with playing at “cool Christianity.” We would not be truly relevant by growing our hair long (which he did) or engaging in social action (which he did). It was achieved by embracing the truth God had given us and letting the watching world see the implications.

The significance of Schaeffer’s burden for truth was because he saw the church giving up on it at the very moment when we most needed to embrace it. To forego this gift would remove “our credibility before the non-Christian, post-Christian, relativistic, skeptical, lost world.”¹⁵ He lamented that there was so

much untruth in the visible church. For him it was a terrible irony that “orthodoxy under the name of orthodoxy is destroying orthodoxy.”¹⁶ Here he was referencing the evangelical drift to neo-orthodoxy—a brand of liberal theology popular in the mid-20th century. Much of the focus of the “new orthodoxy” was a shift in the view of what Scripture is, and how it was to be interpreted. For Schaeffer this was the great evangelical disaster because any undermining of the Bible’s authority was ultimately to weaken the truth claims the church was founded on. That is why he implored the evangelical church to maintain its high view of Scripture because to squander this was to give up on “true truth” and thus to lose our revolutionary edge. As Schaeffer forcefully said: “This is no time for Christianity to allow itself to be infiltrated by relativistic thinking from either the secular or the theological side. It is a time for the church to insist, as a true revolutionary force, that there is a truth. It is possible to know that truth, not exhaustively but truly.”¹⁷ In *The Great Evangelical Disaster*—his last book—Schaeffer implored the church to stand for truth as truth. Any failure here would be nothing less than accommodation to the world.¹⁸

As truth has continued its retreat in Western civilization, recovering Schaeffer’s burden for it is more momentous than ever. It is likely that evangelicalism in the 21st century will be sifted on this very matter, i.e., to stand for it under the cultural pressure we are facing, or to give it up and go with the flow. Like never before in the modern period, our pledge to this revolutionary truth must be reactivated, and hearing Schaeffer’s burden can help us here.

SCHAEFFER’S SECOND BURDEN: THE CHURCH MUST BE A PRACTICAL DEMONSTRATION OF THE LOVE OF THE TRIUNE GOD.

A key understanding for Schaeffer’s view of the church was his idea of the double orthodoxy. He stated it this way: “But one cannot explain the explosive dynamite, the *dunamis*, of the early church apart from the fact that they practiced two things simultaneously: orthodoxy of doctrine and orthodoxy of community in the midst of the visible church, a community which the world could see. By the grace of God, therefore, the church must be known simultaneously for its purity of doctrine and the reality of its community. Our churches have so often been only preaching points with very little emphasis on community. But exhibition of the love of God in practice is beautiful and must be there.”¹⁹

Schaeffer’s passionate concern for the church to show an orthodoxy of loving community may come as a surprise to many. His passion for the truth side is more familiar to evangelicals because of his better-known trilogy, where he argues for the rational credibility of Christianity. However, reading through his books addressed to the church, the emphasis on the quality of our relationships comes through repeatedly. For Schaeffer the world had “a right to judge whether we are Christians and whether the Father sent the Son, on the basis of observable love shown among all true Christians.”²⁰ On this matter he was as uncompromising as he was with “true truth.”

An appreciation of significant events in his own life is a key to why this mattered so much. The young Schaeffer was part of the original “fundamentalists” in the 1940s, who took their stand against the liberal compromise and fought for the core basics of Christian belief. You see this reflected in J. Gresham Machen and his seminal book, *Christianity and Liberalism*. While being a watershed moment for evangelicals, many of them took contending for truth to an extreme, miring much of the movement in division and fall out. Much of it became “separatist” and a “sensitive” Schaeffer viewed it all with a growing disillusionment. He stated it this way: “I believe very strongly in the principle and practice of the purity of the visible church, but I have seen churches that have fought for purity and are merely hotbeds of ugliness. No longer is there any observable, loving, personal relationship even in their own midst, let alone with other true Christians.”²¹

While he had deep sympathy with the core theological commitments of the “fundamentalists,” he had no time for the ugly orthodoxy that became its hallmark. Tragically the movement went beyond the fundamentals of the faith and majored on minors drawing a line in the sand on secondary issues. Throughout his life Schaeffer steered clear of controversy connected to “minor” issues calling those who did so “agitators” and “absolutists even in the lesser points of doctrine.”²² He stated, “one must realize that there is a great difference between believing in absolutes and having an absolutist mentality about everything.”²³

So deeply did Schaeffer’s experience of the fundamentalists mark him that it precipitated a spiritual crisis in the early 1950s. How could Christianity be true if it produced something so ugly? This pushed him to go back to the basics of Christianity, which then led him into a time of deep and abiding spiritual renewal. In this experience he tasted the love of the triune God

meaningfully and that experience marked him permanently. The outcome of his own renewal was a deep burden for the church to be a real demonstration of a loving community. “I am convinced that in the twentieth century people all over the world will not listen if we have the right doctrine, the right polity, but are not exhibiting community.”²⁴

Today, when community is all the rage it is important to see how Schaeffer understood it. There are few issues that create more idealism than the modern bent towards communitarian values. As someone who experienced firsthand the reality of the L’Abri community, Schaeffer was no romantic in his understanding of what it entailed. Within L’Abri he often quipped that “community isn’t difficult, it’s impossible.” Such a statement reflected Schaeffer’s conviction that the community of believers could be nothing less than a supernatural reality grounded in the Godhead. “But regardless of its outward form, the Christian community as a community should understand that its first relationship is not horizontal, but vertical. The Christian community is made up of those who are in a personal relationship with God, and then the community as a unit is to strive to be first of all in a relationship with God. Its first job is not toward the lost, though it has a task there. The first thing the Christian community should do is to stand as a community in a living, existential, moment-by-moment relationship to God.”²⁵

For Schaeffer the reality of the loving community was not something we could organize and create but rather it had to flow from Christ’s work in and through us. Only this could create a real orthodoxy of community before the watching world. “They should see that what has happened in Christ’s death and reconciliation on the cross back there in space and time and history is relevant, that it is possible to have something beautiful and unusual in this world in our communication and in communities at this point of history.”²⁶

So central was this reality for Schaeffer that he called it “the mark of a Christian”—a mark needing a practical demonstration. “We may preach truth. We may preach orthodoxy. We may even stand against the practice of untruth strongly. But if others cannot see something beautiful in our human relationships, if they do not see that upon the basis of what Christ has done our Christian communities can stop their infighting, then we are not living properly.”²⁷ For him the church was under a divine mandate to live out this community of love because it was “the straightforward and direct command of Jesus Christ.”²⁸ Schaeffer went so far as to call our demonstration of loving

community “the final apologetic”—a show and tell of what we really are to a watching world. As he wrote in *The Mark of a Christian*, “we cannot expect the world to believe that the Father sent the Son, that Jesus’ claims are true, and that Christianity is true, unless the world sees some reality of the oneness of true Christians.”²⁹

As a realist, Schaeffer knew that the church would inevitably fall into moments of conflict causing believers to separate. For him this was the point where we needed to be most careful to show our mutual love i.e., “we must show forth the love of God to those with whom we differ.”³⁰ While holding this out as a possibility in our times of differences he was despondent about what he actually witnessed. “Forty-five years ago in the Presbyterian crisis in the United States, we forgot that. We did not speak with love about those with whom we differed, and we have been paying a high price for it ever since.”³¹

Schaeffer’s burden for the church to be a demonstration of loving community is a timely reminder today in our present age of grievance. Regrettably the culture war divide—and in particular the rift between the political left and right—has spilled into our churches, leaving our unity in tatters. Politically motivated matters have become the new test of fellowship, and the rancor within is what the watching world sees. Our commitment to a *social justice orthodoxy* can take precedence over an *orthodoxy of doctrine*, and this causes a breakdown of our love and community. The call to live in Schaeffer’s double orthodoxy is one we must heed if we are not to be caught up in the tide of outrage engulfing our culture. Because Schaeffer was clear that the orthodoxy of truth and the orthodoxy of community was ultimately rooted in God there was no conflict between them. The *both/and* nature of the double orthodoxy would guarantee that our commitment to community would not be at the expense of God’s revealed truth. He also wanted to us to be clear that to have one without the other would be nothing less than a failure of what Christ called us to be. Hence why he urged us to both—another timely dimension to Schaeffer’s burden for the contemporary church.

SCHAEFFER’S THIRD BURDEN: THE CHURCH MUST LIVE IN ITS GOD-GIVEN FREEDOM

On this matter, Schaeffer wrote the following: “My primary point as we prepare for the end of the twentieth century is, on the one hand, that there is a place

for the institutional church and that it should maintain the form commanded by God, but, on the other hand, that this also leaves vast areas of freedom for change.”³² As one surveys all of Schaeffer’s thought, “form and freedom” was clearly important for him. He often emphasized that humans are not merely sticks or stones and that our choices mattered. The freedom we possessed as humans was only possible because of certain forms prescribed by our Creator. We have the freedom to walk in a straight line because gravity is the form that makes this possible. He was also clear that the dice was loaded against freedom in the social realm. Within the flow of history, autocracy has been the norm and few truly championed freedom. The Athenian *polis* and the Roman Republic may have taken tentative steps towards a democracy of sorts, but despots like Julius Caesar quickly ended such with a tyrannical rule. The reason Schaeffer was a great champion of freedom was because he knew Christianity provided a basis for it like no other worldview could. To be a believer was to be liberated into a new freedom based on our redemption in Christ. As new creatures indwelt by the Holy Spirit, a new principle of freedom opens up—one unknown and unavailable previously. For that reason, Schaeffer called on the church to lean towards the principle of freedom, and part of this included being flexible on the matter of the form and polity of the church.

Of course, there are mandated forms given by Christ to govern the church’s life. On these matters Schaeffer said little because in his understanding such forms were straightforwardly laid down by Scripture—instruction in the Word, the sacraments, church discipline and an appropriate leadership structure. He was clear that *there is a place for the institutional church* and he rooted his in a theological conviction standing in the Westminster tradition with a commitment to a Presbyterian ecclesiology. We can see evidence of this conviction because he even founded a denomination—the International Presbyterian Church in Europe.

However, within such necessary forms he was also clear that “there are vast areas which are left free.”³³ Although he may have been conservative theologically, that didn’t make him conservative in everything. Unlike many committed to the “historic” faith, Schaeffer applied the principle of liberty in terms of the outward shape and form of the church. He urged the evangelical church to distinguish between “things that are open to change from those that are not.”³⁴ While he called the church to stand firm in the truth, he wanted it to be flexible in structure and organization and warned against it becoming ossified. “This is

not a day for a sleepy church—a church that is merely operating on the basis of memory and is afraid to be free where it needs to be free within the form of Scripture.”³⁵ As he viewed the church at the end of the 20th century he sensed a rigidity possibly leading to our undoing. “In a rapidly changing age like ours, an age of total upheaval like ours, to make non absolutes absolute guarantees both isolation and the death of the institutional, organized church.”³⁶

As it happens, the past five decades have seen much of evangelicalism opting for adaptation, and alternative forms of church abound! As I survey the present scene, it seems reasonable to divide the evangelical church into two groups: the confessionalists and the pragmatists. The former takes the past seriously, receiving a tradition for its life in both doctrine and practice. As modernity increasingly breaks with every form of tradition, there is much to be commended in such an approach. The danger though is that ancient forms can obscure the freedoms we require to be the church in this present moment. The pragmatists go the other direction and throw over every form of tradition in order to find what works. Such an approach severs them from the rich heritage of the past. Using their flexibility to create new church structure and forms, they trade one for another as quickly as cultural fashions shift. Their freedom to be trendy is too often a path that leads them to novelty with a loss of Biblical essentials, i.e., the necessary forms being discarded like the proverbial baby with the bathwater. There are good reasons why Schaeffer’s entreaty to the church to live with integrity within its form and freedom is as valid as ever. It is critical for us to keep to the Biblical basics but within these to make change as necessary. For Schaeffer, getting this right was not a matter of being smart but being led by the Spirit. He wrote that a “refusal to consider change under the direction of the Holy Spirit is a spiritual problem, not an intellectual problem.”³⁷ Under the Spirit’s direction what the church is today it may not be tomorrow and we must be open to this. For the church to maintain a vibrant witness to the watching world, this emphasis on our freedom within the limits of form is critical to understand and live out well.

SCHAEFFER’S FOURTH BURDEN: THE CHURCH MUST FUNCTION IN A HIGHER AGENCY

Being a realist, Schaeffer was clear about how complicated it is to be the church before the watching world. “Because the world is hard, confronting

it without God's power is an overwhelming prospect."³⁸ That is why he was burdened for the church to do "the Lord's work in the Lord's way." "There is no source of power for God's people—for preaching or teaching or anything else—except Christ Himself. Apart from Christ, anything which seems to be spiritual power is actually the power of the flesh."³⁹ Any real breakthrough for the church in a hostile world utterly depended on this. In the past 50 years, the resistance of secular humanism has made the world even harder in terms of our mission. A cultural repudiation to organized religion continues to grow as a lasting legacy of the "New Atheism" and the church is no longer viewed as the "good people." Having come under a new moral judgement portraying us as the "immoral" ones—given our Biblically fed convictions on matters like marriage, sexuality and gender—we have a "pariah" status which has increased the opposition. In view of such a challenge, the question that confronts us is how to make a breakthrough? If ever we needed the divine agency, it is now. For the gospel work of the church to prevail in the world we need the same power Paul wrote about in Romans 1:16—one of Schaeffer's favorite Bible verses: "For I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God that brings salvation to everyone who believes: first to the Jew, then to the Gentile."

This sense of our needing to work in a higher agency is a thread that runs through all of Schaeffer's life and work. His own biography supplies the key insight into why this became so central for the man. As Schaeffer entered his spiritual crisis in the early 1950s, one day at breakfast he put forward the following question to Edith: "If every reference to prayer and the Holy Spirit evaporated from the pages of Scripture, would it make any difference"? An honest assessment of that question to his own life and ministry concluded that it would not alter much, i.e., he had been operating in the power of the flesh. That led him to what he called "True Spirituality" which became the foundation for everything that followed. Because Christianity was true, it *had* to be a reality that could be lived out on a moment by moment basis in the "power of the Spirit." This was revolutionary for the Schaeffer's who went on to establish L'Abri on its faith principles where they made themselves intentionally vulnerable so the Lord's power could be demonstrated to those who came and stayed in the community. An example of how this was implemented was in not soliciting support but actively praying for the Lord to provide the finances to keep L'Abri going. While they clarified that

the faith principles of L’Abri were a particular calling for them, Schaeffer was also adamant that the church must do the Lord’s work in the Lord’s way. The same question he asked of his own life and ministry must be one every church should address to themselves: “What difference would it make to the church if prayer and Holy Spirit evaporated from Scripture?”

One reason for this burden was because Schaeffer could see that the church was operating in an agency less than what was required for the task at hand. He wrote: “Is it not amazing: though we know the power of the Holy Spirit can be ours, we still ape the world’s wisdom, trust its forms of publicity, its noise, and imitate its ways of manipulating men! If we try to influence the world by using its methods, we are doing the Lord’s work in the flesh. If we put activity, even good activity, at the center rather than trusting God, then there may be the power of the world, but we will lack the power of the Holy Spirit.”⁴⁰ If he were to view the church in the 21st century his burden for us to operate in a higher agency would be no less. The tendency for us to operate in the “power of the flesh” has increased, and our confidence in human agency looks all prevailing. We have given in to the virus of technique in every area of our ecclesiastical life. Our churches resemble corporations, co-opting business models as our organizing principle. We appeal to the “hard world” with slick marketing, making the church and gospel products to peddle. For Schaeffer this kind of thing was not a problem in the world but a problem with us: “the central problem is always in the midst of the people of God, not in the circumstances surrounding them”⁴¹ and the nub of the central problem was doing the Lord’s work in the power of the flesh rather than the Spirit.

Listening to Schaeffer on this matter is salient to our times. He called for us to be nothing less than a demonstration of something Christ was doing. Given that the core of our beliefs are “supernaturalist” it convicted him that this must be central to our practice. For Schaeffer this was something he was convinced the unbeliever was looking for, i.e., a clear validation in our corporate life that God is real because His power is evident. “Is not the central problem of our generation that the world looks upon the church and sees it trying to do the Lord’s work in the flesh?”⁴² For Schaeffer, living and working in a higher agency had to be the reality because of Pentecost. The Biblical text that guided all of Schaeffer’s work was Acts 1:8: “But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my

witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” He wrote, “the force of the Greek is, “ye shall receive power; then ye shall be witnesses.” A specific order is involved: after having the Holy Spirit come upon them, the disciples were to witness.”⁴³ For Schaeffer our credible witness before the watching world boiled down to a basic trust in the Spirit’s power. “The key question is this: as we work for God in this fallen world, what are we trusting in? To trust in particular methods is to copy the world and to remove ourselves from the tremendous promise that we have something different, the power of the Holy Spirit rather than the power of human technique.”⁴⁴

If the contemporary evangelical church has indeed surrendered to the spirit of modernity—to our strategies, our growth plans and our management systems—we desperately need to hear Schaeffer’s burden. As we look at our corporate life we must ask: “What is of our making?” and “What is the fruit of the Spirit’s power?” As we face the challenge of the hard world, on what are we depending as we seek to get the job done? For Schaeffer, the matter of our agency was the decisive issue and our need of a Divine power was so necessary it was worth waiting for. “Let us not think that waiting on the Lord will mean getting less done. The truth is that by doing the Lord’s work in the Lord’s way we will accomplish more, not less. You need not fear that if you wait for God’s Spirit you will not get as much done as if you charge ahead in the flesh. After all, who can do the most, you or the God of Heaven and earth?”⁴⁵

CONCLUDING REFLECTION

Surveying Schaeffer’s burdens for the church highlights nothing trendy, and that is why they continue to speak with a directness much needed in an age of novelty. Listening to his core themes for the church today—the necessity of truth, of love, of freedom, and of the Spirit’s power—is to hear the cry of the ages. Throughout the church’s history, the Lord has raised up His “prophets” who sounded the same notes. Why? Because to give up on these would be to lose everything!

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- ¹ Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: Vol 4. A Christian View of the Church* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1985), 209.
 - ² *Ibid.*, 69.
 - ³ *Ibid.*
 - ⁴ *Ibid.*, 34.
 - ⁵ *Ibid.*
 - ⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.
 - ⁷ *Ibid.*, 151.
 - ⁸ *Ibid.*, 63.
 - ⁹ *Ibid.*, 70.
 - ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 30.
 - ¹¹ *Ibid.*, 38.
 - ¹² *Ibid.*
 - ¹³ *Ibid.*, 63.
 - ¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 89.
 - ¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 33.
 - ¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 31.
 - ¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 89.
 - ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 320.
 - ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 152.
 - ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 33.
 - ²¹ *Ibid.*, 192.
 - ²² *Ibid.*, 159.
 - ²³ *Ibid.*
 - ²⁴ *Ibid.*, 64.
 - ²⁵ *Ibid.*, 48.
 - ²⁶ *Ibid.*, 33.
 - ²⁷ *Ibid.*
 - ²⁸ *Ibid.*, 195.
 - ²⁹ *Ibid.*, 189.
 - ³⁰ *Ibid.*, 197.
 - ³¹ *Ibid.*, 155.
 - ³² *Ibid.*, 59.
 - ³³ *Ibid.*
 - ³⁴ *Ibid.*, 66.
 - ³⁵ *Ibid.*, 87.
 - ³⁶ *Ibid.*, 60.
 - ³⁷ *Ibid.*, 67.
 - ³⁸ Francis A. Schaeffer, *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer: Vol 3. A Christian View of Spirituality* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 1985), 41.
 - ³⁹ *Ibid.*, 42.
 - ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 47.
 - ⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 44.
 - ⁴² *Ibid.*, 50.
 - ⁴³ *Ibid.*, 42.
 - ⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 47.
 - ⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 49.