

How Should We Then Think?: A Study Of Francis Schaeffer's Lordship Principle

Mark Edwards*

* Mark Edwards is a graduate student in American history at Purdue University.

In recent years, the problem of evangelical intellectual weakness has become a subject of serious discussion and debate. Mark A. Noll believes that characteristics inherent to conservative evangelicalism and fundamentalism are to blame for such failings, arguing in his *Scandal of the Evangelical Mind* that "no mind arises from evangelicalism."¹ Perhaps that claim is nowhere better illustrated than in the life and work of one of modern evangelicalism's most important figures, Presbyterian evangelist and apologist Francis A. Schaeffer IV (1912–1984). Schaeffer emerged out of the fundamentalist-modernist controversies of 1920s America to become one of the leaders in a recent evangelical intellectual renaissance. With his wife Edith, he founded L'Abri Fellowship, a series of Christian communes that started in their home in the Swiss Alps and became physical and spiritual shelters to many alienated youth from all over the world during the 1950s and 1960s. Schaeffer's numerous lectures and L'Abri tapes, twenty-two books, and three film series have influenced millions of conservative Christians since the 1970s, including the leaders of the New Christian Right (NCR).² Most importantly here, Schaeffer, in the theological tradition of Dutch Calvinism, tried to develop a relatively comprehensive Christian worldview, promoting "the Lordship of Christ in the totality of life." Much has been written about Schaeffer, but no critical biography has yet been undertaken. The general tendency among scholars has been to treat his works in fragments and study his thought and writings in isolation from his personal history.³ Recently, Daymon Johnson made Schaeffer's Lordship idea central to his study of the latter's

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involvement with the NCR.⁴ This essay extends Johnson's work by analyzing and critiquing Schaeffer's development of a Christian worldview within the context of American evangelicalism.

The argument made here is that Schaeffer failed in his attempt to foster an adequate Christian worldview. Despite his captivating rhetoric, he was never able to escape the intellectual limitations of certain evangelical and fundamentalist cultural distinctives, particularly an oppositional, defensive stance towards modern American culture. His Lordship idea was never the actual basis of his thought, but rather a...

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