I would like to welcome you to this class on Francis Schaeffer’s book *True Spirituality*. If you don’t know me already, my name is Dan Guinn and I am the founder and developer of a website called francisschaefferstudies.org, which is a site devoted to the study and research of the works of Dr Francis Schaeffer and his wife Edith. We founded the site primarily for the purpose of passing the works of Francis and Edith Schaeffer on to the next generation as well as to make their thought and teaching more accessible for general inquiry. Teaching classes like this is just one of the ways we are attempting to do that. Additionally, we are a free resource to L’Abri and the Francis Schaeffer Community and do various forms of research, projects, and media production to that end.

I want to take a moment and share our primary reasons for teaching the works of Francis Schaeffer, as some may get the wrong idea. We are not doing this to elevate Dr Schaeffer, but rather firstly, to be Biblical. We believe Scripture instructs us to remember our leaders and consider the outcome of their way of life. Here is our guiding verse.

- Remember your leaders, those who spoke to you the word of God. Consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith. (Hebrews 13:7 ESV)

Scripture provides further instruction in this role of “imitating their faith”:
- Brothers, join in imitating me, and keep your eyes on those who walk according to the example you have in us. (Philippians 3:17 ESV)

Paul instructs as to why we should imitate him:
- Be imitators of me, as I am of Christ. Now I commend you because you remember me in everything and maintain the traditions even as I delivered them to you. (1 Corinthians 11:1-2 ESV)

Schaeffer is one of many possible historical figures one might study who have valuable things to say. Yet Schaeffer is perhaps unique in that what he is saying has so much relevance to learning what is needed to live in a post-Christian culture. I can think of no other figure who consistently puts forward the historic Christian position in such a way that so profoundly speaks to our current situation. Moreover, the majority of those today who are doing so, were influenced by him. Countless ministries have been influenced by his words and I talk to scholar after scholar who readily admit that it was Schaeffer’s works that first opened their mind to think without committing intellectual suicide. One quote which I share quite often which perhaps sums up the way I think we all need to view Schaeffer, and states it better than any other I have heard is this:

SLIDE: NOT AN ICON
Schaeffer is not an icon to be venerated, but a Christian scholar evangelist of exceptional cloth from whom we can learn much in or passion to reach the nations for Christ. ~ Dr. Bruce A Little, Custodian of the Francis Schaeffer Collection at Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary

For Those New to Schaeffer's History:

If you are new to Francis Schaeffer let me give a very brief history. He was first a pastor in the states for over 10 years before he and his wife Edith were called to be missionaries to post-war Europe with the charge to “strengthen that which remains.” They had previously founded the first Summer Bible School program in St. Louis. What we would now call Vacation Bible School. This would later blossom into a ministry called “Children for Christ” which they were active in spreading as a ministry to children in war torn Europe in their early years as missionaries. In 1955, after resigning from their missions board, they founded a ministry called L’Abri Fellowship, L’Abri is a French word that means “the shelter.” L’Abri is a community dedicated to providing “honest answers to honest questions” as a primary tenant of ministry. At that time, during the period of the 60s, people were actively seeking spiritual enlightenment and asking deep philosophical questions. L’Abri became a haven for people to explore the questions of life and the Christian answers in an honest way. People who visited, experienced love and hospitality, and witnessed a life of prayer that often disarmed them of their perceptions and paved the way for personal spiritual exploration. The Holy Spirit used the work of the Schaeffer’s to bring thousands to Christ and the deeper spiritual life. Later Dr. Schaeffer was an international speaker and author, he is known also for several significant documentary films.

Book Information: Significance and Balance

As we begin to look at the book, it is important to consider its significance in general as well as its significance in Dr. Schaeffer’s works. In my opinion, this is perhaps Dr. Schaeffer’s most foundational work due to what it means in the big picture of his worldview, yet to me personally it is one of the most cherished, as the book literally has changed my life. Every time I teach it, I am thoroughly moved and my own spirituality is deeply strengthened.

In relation to the context of Schaeffer’s works we must recognize that it has a very important place at the center. Many people have formed perceptions about Francis Schaeffer and his thought by not reading him thoroughly. When I interviewed Dr. Calhoun of Covenant Seminary about Schaeffer and asked him how someone who is new to Schaeffer’s works ought to start reading him, he recommended something quite unusual. He recommended that a person read True Spirituality and The God Who Is There at the same time. The reason for this is that it is possible to read Schaeffer’s works that take on more of a cultural apologetic and get the wrong idea about his thought as a whole. However, if one reads Schaeffer in this way, you are not getting a balanced view. Moreover, I would argue that if you haven’t read True Spirituality,
respectfully, you really don’t know Schaeffer. At this point, I will come clean and admit that this was my personal experience. After going through a nearly lifelong, intellectual drought and finally being introduced to Schaeffer’s *How Shall We Then Live?* it was like I had discovered a significant oasis in a parched desert. So while *How Shall We Then Live?* was eye-opening and transformational, my spirituality became rather intellectually driven and imbalanced. I was very bitter at the groups in the church that I had been associated with for ignoring the depth of our faith and concentrating on numerous unprofitable things that were preventing the church and myself from growing. I was angry and rightfully so, but lacking love and compassion. This carried over into my personal relationships. It was not until I also read Dr. Schaeffer’s book *True Spirituality*, that I began, by God’s grace, to achieve some balance. So this is why I feel very strongly that there is a need to clarify Schaeffer’s teaching of both a heart-felt and a mind-felt spirituality, and this is truly significant.

Now also, lest someone just think that this is merely my opinion. Dr. Schaeffer begins the book’s preface with these important words:

> This book is being published after a number of others, but in a certain sense it should have been my first. Without the material in this book there would be no L’Abri.¹

**History**

In actuality, the content of the book has it’s origins before Schaeffer’s other works. Although published in 1971, the content of *True Spirituality* began to come about through a spiritual crisis Schaeffer had in the early 1950s.

**Born in Crisis**

In 1951 and 1952 I faced a spiritual crisis in my own life. I had become a Christian from agnosticism many years before. After that I had become a pastor for ten years in the United States, and then for several years my wife Edith and I had been working in Europe. During this time I felt a strong burden to stand for the historical Christian position, and for the purity of the visible church. Gradually, however, a problem came to me — the problem of reality. This had two parts: first, it seemed to me that among many of those who held the orthodox position, one saw little reality in the things that the Bible so clearly says should be the result of Christianity. Second, it gradually grew on me that my own reality was less than it had been in the early days after I had become a Christian. I realized that in honesty I had to go back and rethink my whole position.” ~ Francis Schaeffer, Preface to *True Spirituality*

Later on in my ministry I faced another crisis that equally influenced the writing of my books. It came after I had already been a pastor for ten years in the U.S. and a

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¹ Schaeffer, Francis. Preface to *True Spirituality.*
missionary to Europe for five years. Throughout this period one thing was dinned into my thinking: "Why," I asked, "is there so little reality among orthodox evangelical Christians? Why is there so little beauty in the way Christians deal with one another?"

This led to doubts about the reality of spiritual things in my own life. I realized that although I had been studying for years and although I had been active in Christian ministry and although I was becoming more and more known in certain Christian circles, the reality of my own spiritual life was diminished. Somehow I had lost what I had when I first became a Christian.

For about two months I walked out in the Swiss mountains. When it rained, I walked in the old hayloft above our chalet. And as I prayed, I went all the way back to my agnosticism. With as much honesty as I could, I asked myself, "Was I right in becoming a Christian as a young man?" The unreality I had found in the Christian world, the ugliness I saw in Christian relationships, the fact that Christians were not able to talk to twentieth-century people, all these things made me ask, "Was I right?"

Schaeffer comments in a letter more specifically on the matters encountered in their movement.

Separatism

There really are many things about our [separated] movement which have made me increasingly unhappy. I do not think our movement is in the place where the Lord can bless it, as its basic principles would seem to indicate. Not that I think our separation is wrong—my time in Europe has convinced me that we are 1,000 percent right in this. But I do think that [certain ones among our men] have missed the woods for the trees.~ Schaeffer, The Letters of Francis Schaeffer, pg 32, Lane T. Dennis

Development: The Secret of Power

Enclosed is a copy of an article I have just sent to the Sunday School Times. I have been writing it for two years; it has meant more to me than any article I have ever written. I do not know if they will print it, but I am sure the Lord has a use for it somewhere.

May the Lord bless you. And let us spend a real time in prayer together that the Lord will show the balance between purity and love, which will give us a real joy in our Lord and the power in His service." (April 14th, 1951) ~ Schaeffer, The Letters of Francis Schaeffer, pg 32, Lane T. Dennis

Schaeffer published two articles that year in The Sunday School Times and one fits this description: The Secret of the Power & Enjoyment of the Lord.

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There is much that we could review in the content of the Letters of Francis Schaeffer, that would be helpful on this matter, but for sake of time I will just say, that if you desire to learn more about Dr. Schaeffer’s journey in this read Part 1 of the Letters, entitled *The Reawakening of Spiritual Reality*.

**Furlough 1953-1954**

Later by 1954, the Schaeffers return to the US with their family on furlough, and Fran began an extensive speaking and traveling schedule. Schaeffer traveled across the country speaking 346 times during 515 days, sometimes three times a day, about the deeper spiritual life. Part of this teaching schedule also included courses at Covenant Seminary. During this time Schaeffer first presented the aforementioned talks which grew out of his spiritual crisis and later became the basis for the *True Spirituality*. Several of the sermons that he developed during this time are now found in the book *No Little People*. These titles include, “The Lord’s Work in the Lord’s Way,” “It is Difficult to walk in Mud and Not Get Dirty” (later called “Walking Through The Mud”), and his classic, “Ash Heap Lives,” which is both a separate sermon and the book title of the British version of what would later be printed in the United States as *No Little People*. Yet of the sermons specifically relating to *True Spirituality*, there was his illustration of “The Two Chairs,” which was an illustration Schaeffer used quite often, and shows up in different forms such as in his third work *Death in the City*, as well as *True Spirituality*. Another message, closely related to *True Spirituality* was “Living in the Supernatural Now,” which is the subject of chapter 5. Yet perhaps the most significant of the talks during this period was the development of a series of talks for a summer Bible camp in Dakota. Schaeffer seemed to have had a brainstorm of thought on spirituality and stayed up for many hours night after night preparing a series of talks which he called “Sanctification I, II, III, IV, V,” which he delivered from July 5th through the 12th of 1953. These would be developed into the full corpus of *True Spirituality*, the study that for him would change everything.

**Final Version**

These principles which I worked out in Champery were first delivered as talks at a Bible camp in an old barn in Dakota. This was in July of 1953. They were developed on scraps of paper in the pastor’s basement. The Lord gave something very special from these messages, and I’m still meeting those who as young people had their thinking and their lives changed there. After L’Abri began in 1955, I preached these same messages in Huemoz [see www.labri-ideas-library.org]. Later they were developed further in a more complete form in Pennsylvania, in 1963. I then gave them again in Huemoz in the late winter and early spring of 1964. This was their final form and the form in which they are recorded on the L’Abri tapes. The Lord used those tapes and later the book in a way that moved us deeply, not only with those with spiritual problems, but for many who had psychological needs as well. ~ Francis Schaeffer, Preface to True Spirituality
Inspiring L’Abri

And finally the sun came out. I saw that my earlier decisions to step from agnosticism to Bible-believing Christianity was right, and I also discovered that I had been missing something vital in my biblical understanding. It was this: that the finished work of Christ on the cross, back there in time and space, has a moment-by-moment meaning. Christ meant His promise to be taken literally when He said that He would bear His fruit through us if we allowed Him to do so, not only in our religious life but in all of our life. Christ meant to be Lord of my whole life. This brought my life to a great shattering moment. What began as struggle ended in a song. Without that crisis, I could never have written *True Spirituality*, for that book is the outcome of that personal struggle.

This, then, was the background when, in 1955, my wife and I began L'Abri in the little town of Huemoz, Switzerland. Edith and I committed ourselves to God with one single aim. It was not an evangelistic work we wished to start, nor a young people’s work, nor a work for intellectuals, nor an outreach to drug people. It was simply that we offered ourselves to God and asked Him very profoundly if He would use us to demonstrate that He exists in our generation. That's all L'Abri is, that's the way it began.3

Significance in Context of His & Edith's Works

Now, knowing the history, at this point I would like to return to the question of the significance of *True Spirituality* in Dr. Schaeffer’s works. In order to do that we need to understand how Dr. Schaeffer’s works are organized. Schaeffer was not the type of writer to catch a fancy and then move on to something else, his works were no arbitrary arrangement of writings. Rather, he was consistently writing on a central theme through his entire writing career.

SLIDE: Organization of Works

- Theme: The Lordship of Christ in the Whole of Life
- Trilogy as the hub
- *True Spirituality* the Basis of L'Abri
- *L'Abri* book was written 5 years before and rest in a box under their bed until after Schaeffer’s books were published.
- Combined with Edith’s works
- Balance with Edith’s works (Art/Beauty/Hospitality)
- Connection of *Basic Bible Studies*
- Connection with *The Mark of a Christian*

Lordship

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As evangelical Christians, we have tended to relegate art to the very fringe of life. The rest of human life we feel is more important. Despite our constant talk about the Lordship of Christ, we have narrowed its scope to a very small area of reality. We have misunderstood the concept of the Lordship of Christ over the whole of man and the whole of the universe and have not taken to us the riches that the Bible gives us for ourselves, for our lives, and for our culture.

The Lordship of Christ over the whole of life means that there are no Platonic areas in Christianity, no dichotomy or hierarchy between the body and the soul. God made the body as well as the soul, and redemption is for the whole man. Evangelicals have been legitimately criticized for often being so tremendously interested in seeing souls get saved and go to Heaven that they have not cared much about the whole man.

~ Francis Schaeffer, Art and the Bible

Trilogy

“The basic trilogy has been: The God Who Is There, Escape from Reason, and He Is There and He is Not Silent. All the others fit into these as spokes of the wheel fit into the hub.

The early books broke ground in calling for the Lordship of Christ in the arts — art, literature, cinema, philosophy and so on. How Should We Then Live?, Whatever Happened to the Human Race? and A Christian Manifesto bring this body of thought forward into the area of a Christian’s duty, under the Lordship of Christ, in the whole of life as a citizen, especially in the area of law, government, and standing for a high view of human life.” ~ Schaeffer, Preface to The Complete Works

True Spirituality as a Basis

All the books are to be read and understood together (along with my wife Edith’s books). They together are a unit. ~ Francis Schaeffer, Preface to the Complete Works

In our ministry my wife and I have consciously tried to balance the intellectual with the spiritual and personal sides. This is seen particularly in L’Abri and True Spirituality; also, the last chapter of Death in the City stresses the reality of the individual and the group relationship to God. ~ Francis Schaeffer, Why and How I Write My Books, Eternity Magazine. 1973.

Edith’s book L’Abri, is a vital element, and without it the other books lack true unity and balance. Her book shows how acting upon the fact that the infinite-personal God is really there has worked out in the day-by-day practice in the community of L’Abri. True Spirituality is likewise crucial; it is a systematic treatment of the whole basis of a Christian’s living in an open relationship with God and then with himself and others. ~ Francis Schaeffer, Introduction to Francis Schaeffer, How I Have Come to Write My Books. 1974.
**Summary**

In this class you will learn that it is not enough to merely be spiritual, whereas many conceive of spirituality as something mystical and far removed from the practical aspects of life. Dr. Schaeffer's book, *True Spirituality*, on the other hand, points us toward a personal spirituality with the whole Trinity, that touches the whole of life and stands out as a living, breathing, cultural apologetic. I encourage you to learn from this classic work on the living of the Christian life in a post-Christian setting.