

Baylor prof says Schaeffer remained a fundamentalist

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Baylor prof says evangelical godfather Schaefer returned to fundamentalism

By Hannah Elliott

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WASHINGTON (ABP)—Many evangelical scholars agree [Francis Schaeffer](#) was the single greatest force that propelled evangelicals into political action—ultimately putting George W. Bush in the White House. But some question whether he rightly is described as a fundamentalist.

While some scholars think Schaeffer, the popular author and theologian who helped a generation of evangelicals move toward the public square, left fundamentalism behind during his lifetime, Baylor University professor [Barry Hankins](#) is reticent to concede that point.

“Historians have defined fundamentalism as the militaristic defense of orthodoxy,” Hankins told more than 1,000 theologians who gathered at the [Evangelical Theological Society](#) meeting in Washington, D.C. True fundamentalism, he said, encompasses two parts—militancy and separatism. In Hankins’ view, Schaeffer embodied both throughout his career.

Hankins believes Schaeffer went through three phases during his theological life—the “fundamentalist period,” the [L’Abri](#) period and the Christian Right period.

In the early years before establishing L’Abri, a forum for discussion and study in Huemoz-sur-Ollon, Switzerland, Schaeffer worried almost constantly that the separatist mindset would disappear within the theologically conservative Bible Presbyterian Church to which he belonged. He worked closely with Carl McIntire, a then-popular fundamentalist radio preacher and founder of Bible Presbyterian.

“Schaeffer was even a second-degree separationist,” Hankins said, referring to the belief that Christians should not associate even with other Christians who associate with “the world.”

“That is, he believed fundamentalists should not labor” with other mainline churches, he said. “Schaeffer’s criticism of the (National Association of Evangelicals) extended to Fuller Seminary. This was secondary separation, and Schaeffer was adamant.”

Fuller Theological Seminary, located in Pasadena, Calif., is a multid denominational, evangelical seminary known for a progressive stance on social issues.

After a mutual and irreversible rift emerged with McIntire, who had developed increasingly separatist leanings, Schaeffer began the L’Abri community in 1955 at his home. Although initial plans for Schaeffer’s move to Europe in 1948 was to “shore up” evangelical churches in the post-WWII context, he “moved increasingly toward a position of intellectual and cultural engagement,” Hankins said.

During the time in Europe, Schaeffer and his wife, Edith, realized that, in a secular culture, attacking people who had so-called liberal ideologies was relatively unproductive. Instead, he engaged those sometimes shunned by

churches—hippies, existentialists, Bohemians, relativists, atheists and unwed mothers.

Meeting these young people “where they were” spiritually and philosophically was Schaeffer’s evangelism, Hankins said. Unlike in the United States, where young people were not yet questioning traditional philosophy and spirituality, Schaeffer encountered in Europe those who struggled with questions posed by Soren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche and Sigmund Freud. The results, Hankins said, were Schaeffer’s apologetics.

“Schaeffer was the model of tolerance and understanding,” he said. “All worldviews were welcomed. ... The conversations were never really academic. They were about truth and how it affected real lives. It was about apologetics in the pit—down and dirty.”

After his return to the United States, Schaeffer frequently visited college campuses across the nation, trying to energize students in ways almost opposite to the stricter ideas that characterized his early days. In short, he turned from a McIntire protégé into a cultural critic. And his knickers, goatee and long hair only helped endear him to the counter-cultural generation he befriended.

The 1970s, though, brought a slight turn in Schaeffer’s thinking, Hankins asserted.

Schaeffer moved back to the United States because he saw a chance to defend American culture from the “liberalism” of Europe, Hankins said. Schaeffer feared American evangelicalism was susceptible to theological liberalism.

“Europe was lost in this regard; you won’t find Schaeffer trying to restore Switzerland’s or France’s Christian base,” Hankins said. “Moreover, Europe was not his land and, most tragically in his view, America had lost

its Christian base as recently as in his lifetime.”

A Christian Manifesto, written by Schaeffer in 1982, was one way he sought to defend the faith. Intended as a response to the *Communist Manifesto* and the *Humanist Manifesto*, the book said society—to its detriment—had become increasingly pluralistic. Schaeffer also argued that Christians should challenge the influence of secular humanism, the worldview that “man is the measure of all things.”

“In the 1970s, the militancy and combativeness for Schaeffer’s fundamentalism were still there,” Hankins said. Schaeffer believed anything that undermined creationism undercut all of Christianity, and he warned against working with those who questioned the inerrancy of the Bible, Hankins said.

For Schaeffer in the ’70s and ’80s, the identifiable enemy was the secular humanist. *How Shall We Then Live?* and *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?* defined Schaeffer’s manifesto, Hankins said.

“*A Christian Manifesto* is nothing if not militant. Culturally separatist it is not, but it is militant,” he said.

Twenty years after Schaeffer’s death, Christian Right leaders like Jerry Falwell and Tim LaHaye still are influenced by fundamentalism’s separatist tradition, Hankins said. While Schaeffer and others relinquished their separatism in order to better understand and reach people, extreme fundamentalists have failed to do so, he asserted.

Schaeffer met people on common ground as human beings, Hankins said. He lived as an alien in European culture, and that alienation taught him to study and teach within a secular context—much like that of the United States today.

“Militant defense of the faith is too easily adaptable to politics, and it

comes with a price,” he said. “Perhaps the most valuable lesson Americans can take from Schaeffer is to leave America—not literally as he did, of course, but figuratively and theologically.”

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