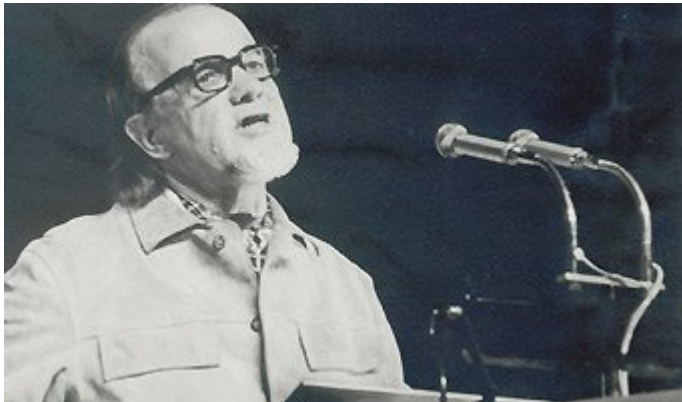


# Francis Schaeffer's son says his father wouldn't recognize the movement he birthed

October 23, 2008

WASHINGTON (RNS)—As a Christian philosopher, author and political activist, Francis Schaeffer urged conservative Christians to battle abortion and engage the secular culture. But he would have recoiled from the “snide” comments and jeering at this summer’s Republican National Convention, his son Frank claims.



Francis Schaeffer, who died in 1984, provided the philosophical foundation for the Religious Right.

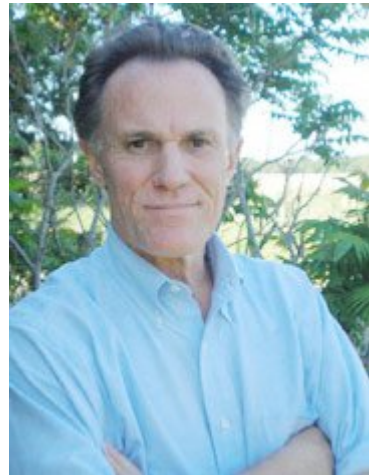
“My father would have been embarrassed to be in that room—absolutely horrified,” said Schaeffer, who once rallied conservative Christians in public arenas alongside his father.

Considered by many an architect of what became the Religious Right, Francis Schaeffer’s Christian moral philosophy has been perverted into a purely political movement that is “essentially the heart and soul of the Republican party,” said Frank Schaeffer, author of the 2007 memoir, *Crazy*

*for God: How I Grew Up as One of the Elect, Helped Found the Religious Right, and Lived to Take All (or Almost All) of it Back.*

Schaeffer, 56, takes a lot of it back in the book, which was just released in paperback by De Capo Press. He reveals new details about his famous but troubled family, and takes sharp jabs at a religious political movement for which he feels partly responsible.

“Crazy for God was a way of exorcising my own demons, and a sense of guilt at having helped unleash something that grew beyond all recognition from where it started,” the younger Schaeffer said in an interview.



Schaeffer's son, Frank, says his father would be embarrassed by the modern religious-conservative movement. (RNS photos/courtesy Frank Schaeffer)

He does so with a bluntness that has drawn positive reviews and sharp criticism, particularly of his often-unflattering depiction of his father and his mother, Edith. Describing his upbringing at L'Abri, his parents'

religious community in Switzerland, he portrays a literate household visited frequently by hippies and celebrities, as well as a marriage marred by Francis' jealousy and abuse of Edith.

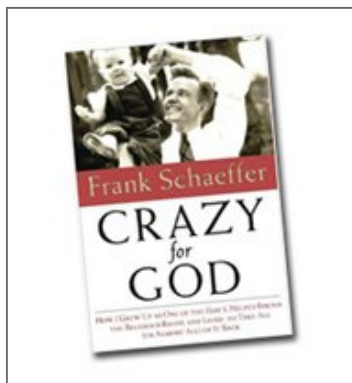
In *Books & Culture*, author Os Guinness, a close family friend, called it a "scurrilous caricature" of the parents as con artists. "No critic or enemy of Francis Schaeffer has done more damage to his life's work than his son, Frank," Guinness wrote.

Frank Schaeffer insists he admires his father, who died in 1984 at age 72, but says he "certainly wasn't flawless." He credits his father with opening a door to art, music and literature to a generation of evangelicals.

"I've been criticized for a tell-all book on the Schaeffers," he said from his home near Boston. "It's the opposite. I'm trying to rescue my dad's reputation from a very narrow group of people who have very much misused him."

*Crazy for God* castigates evangelical icons such as the late Jerry Falwell, Pat Robertson and James Dobson, with whom father and son once worked. They were "anti-American religious revolutionaries," he writes, who "would later use their power in ways that would have made my father throw up."

"It began to dawn on me that bad news was good news to these guys," Schaeffer said in the interview. "The worse it gets, the sooner Jesus will come back ... and the more (they're) proved right."



Schaeffer also writes of his association with Billy Zeoli of the Michigan-based Gospel Communications International, and longtime Gospel chairman Rich DeVos. Gospel distributed a film version of Francis Schaeffer's classic work, *How Should We Then Live?* Frank Schaeffer directed and produced the film.

A seminar tour based on the video helped shoot Francis Schaeffer to evangelical stardom. Although describing Zeoli as "slick and worldly" and DeVos as the "far-right founder-capitalist-guru" of Amway, Schaeffer doesn't fault them for what he regards as a wrong turn in his and his father's ministry.

"The mistake was trying to get Christians to vote along theological lines instead of what's good for the country," Schaeffer said.

Schaeffer has left the Republican Party—he considers himself an independent and is supporting Sen. Barack Obama for president—and the evangelical movement. He finds the Greek Orthodox Church more suitable to his spirituality than being a "professional Christian."

"If you're an evangelist, you've got to be a special person not to lose your grip on what you believe," he said. "I lost my grip. I had to get out for the salvation of my soul."

*Charles Honey writes for The Grand Rapids Press in Grand Rapids, Mich.*