

Schaeffer Lecture 10

April 10, 2023

10A: Schaeffer and His Critics (Lane Dennis, 1986)

- VP Crossway; worked with Schaeffer on the publication of his last two books (*GED* and *CM*)
- edited *Letters of Francis A. Schaeffer* (1985)
- Dennis describes Schaeffer's critics as those who see his body of work as a whole and those who see a difference between the "early" Schaeffer and the "late" Schaeffer; this examination concerns the latter
- FAS was not an academic specialist and never claimed to be; it's dishonest criticism to discredit him on the basis of a definition rather than interacting with his ideas
- criticism typically follows one of three categories: (1) his view of the Christian consensus; (2) his interpretation of the Reformation; (3) his interpretation of Kierkegaard

- Noll: "The danger is that people will take him as a scholar, which he is not. Evangelical historians are especially bothered by his simplified myth of America's Christian past."
- did Schaeffer teach that America is a "Christian Nation"—that it is or was specially chosen as a covenant people in the New World? he often used terms like Christian consensus, Biblical consensus, and Christian ethos
- no—but that Christian principles were widely known and influential in shaping culture
 - AdT describes this kind of pervasive religious influence in *Democracy in America*
 - sociologist Max Weber sees the influence of Calvinistic thinking in American capitalism
- Schaeffer's three undeniable points: (1) ideas have consequences (Christian ideas shaped the culture); (2) many positive influences grew out of the Christian consensus in the early years of the country; (3) something has changed drastically over the last forty years or so (there has been a cultural revolution)

- Reformation as a golden age (the ideal we must return to)
- Ronald Wells: "Modern society . . . should return to the absolute norms articulated by the Reformation"
- Mark Noll: "Surely the elder Schaeffer is mistaken in his frequent assertion that the Reformation preserved both 'form and freedom' in perfect balance"
- is there any truth behind this assertion? (Dennis can't find any)
- FAS: "The Reformation was certainly not a golden age. It was far from perfect, and in many ways did not act consistently with the Bible's teaching . . ."
- Dennis: "the assertions made by Wells and Noll are unfounded"
- Wells' own views of the Reformation were problematical: "Protestantism [is] the religious form of Renaissance humanism"

- Steven Evans: “some well-known evangelical pastors and authors have chosen Kierkegaard as a central villain in their account of how the twentieth century lost its faith and its moorings”—Schaeffer being the primary source
- FAS: “Kierkegaard led to the conclusion that you could not arrive at synthesis by reason. Instead, you achieve everything of real importance by a leap of faith. . . . in his more philosophical writings he did become the father of modern thought. . . . what he wrote gradually led to the absolute separation of the rational and logical from faith.”
- the illustration of “the leap of faith” is Abraham’s sacrifice of Isaac
- Dennis: “[Schaeffer’s] views are misrepresented, and . . . an alternate, somewhat novel view is being advanced by his critics”
- Dennis sees the pattern as follows: (1) criticize a certain area; (2) misrepresent his argument; (3) show that the false argument is ‘untenable’; (4) present your own more ‘tenable’ view; (5) notice that the untenable view is from the critic
- (we think this is a straw man—setting up your opponent’s position in a way that makes it easier to refute)
- Dennis adamantly defends Schaeffer as a scholar—learned, but not academic
- Schaeffer’s saw himself primarily as an evangelist; he defended the need for academic specialization in the areas he spoke about; he emphasized the unity of all reality
- FAS as a *generalist*—which creates a natural tension with his work and the work of academics (here we could raise many objections to the specialization of the academic who naturally looks down on anyone meddling in his area expertise—it is an axiom that academic attracts and/or breeds enormous egos)
- Dennis: “Schaeffer’s concern . . . was that philosophy, or any other discipline, needs to go beyond mastery of the details and to see the relationship of each discipline to the general map—to the larger questions of meaning, purpose, and the unity of all reality. Without this, the study of details is meaningless.” (here we must add, study of the details is *not* meaningless to the academic who has built his career on such microscopy—he is judged by his peers according to the depth of his specialization!)
- Schaeffer expected his critics to use his errors to undermine his whole argument
- his work remains the standard since no other Christian thinker has attempted this kind of comprehensive interpretation
- on the other hand, Schaeffer would have been enthusiastic for specialists to take up where he left off as a generalist in the various fields of inquiry
- university as a battleground of ideas: Dennis: “It is not easy to go through a Ph.D. program without being **affected** by the naturalistic presuppositions which reign virtually unchallenged in every discipline.” (here we suspect Dennis is understating the case—he received his Ph.D. from Northwestern University in the sociology of religion; rather than “*affected*” we would propose “*constrained*”—because the professors control the institutions with their presuppositions)
- he goes on: “The danger is that in being forced to play the game by the naturalist’s rules, we will eventually absorb some form of naturalism ourselves and abandon a distinctly Christian position.”

- summary: “No genuine distinction can be made between the intellectual concerns of the ‘early Schaeffer’ and the activist concerns of the ‘later Schaeffer.’”

10B: A Christian Manifesto (North and Chilton, 1983)

- we think an appropriate metaphor here is “taking Schaeffer to the woodshed”
- this is a critique that bites—and at times is unnecessarily sarcastic
- N/C are so concerned about the popularity of *CM* that they feel compelled to speak out; there is a need for consistency in the theology of Christian resistance
- being at war with humanism requires getting our offensive and defensive strategies agreed upon before entering the battle
- Schaeffer’s books “simultaneously soften and toughen up Christians . . . He offers Christians little or no hope in their ability to do anything substantial to reverse the drift of humanism over the falls.”
- his writings have exposed the intellectual weakness of humanism—probably his most important contribution—but he expects victory only in the return of Christ
- his books are liabilities as training manuals for the battle—he does not answer the questions he raises
- when he does have answers, they appear to come from others who are not properly credited
- *CM*: American apostasy from Christianity into humanism has had grievous effects in all areas of life
- N/C: “In both intention and act, the Founders established the United States as a Christian nation.”
- Schaeffer repeatedly denies theocracy as the solution, but he never answers the question of what should take its place
- N/C: “For us, the question is not ‘Theocracy or no theocracy?’ but increasingly, ‘Whose theocracy?’”
- N/C: “The Reformed Confessions . . . recognized the Scriptural demand for the Christianization of all culture.” (before they were modified!)
- (they then reference both the original version of the Belgic confession and the original Westminster Confession that include state duties for suppressing idolatry)
- Rutherford as a uncompromising theocrat and member of Westminster Assembly; one whom Schaeffer professes to follow; by rejecting theocracy Schaeffer denies Rutherford’s position
- one of the “most well-kept secrets in modern evangelicalism”: Schaeffer has been reading Rushdoony for twenty years
- comparison between Rushdoony and Schaeffer demonstrates remarkable parallels, but Schaeffer appeals to one of Rushdoony’s sources (Francis Legge—who is *not* theocratic) without mentioning Rushdoony
- besides Rushdoony, Schaeffer is indebted to CVT but never cites his work
- N/C: “[The leaders of the New Christian Right] are getting much of their material, their insights, even their slogans, from the Christian Reconstructionists.”
- (around 1983, Schaeffer was asked if he was a Reconstructionist and he replied that he didn’t even know what the word means; we find that statement dubious!)

- N/C: “*Leaders of the New Christian Right are needlessly avoiding controversies concerning one of the three vital pillars of a consistent Christian apologetic, namely, biblical law.*” (italics in the original)
- Schaeffer is therefore straddling the fence—rejecting neutrality on the one hand, and theocracy on the other
- N/C: “The lowest-common-denominator principle [of pluralism] is what got us into this mess in the first place. . . . Dr. Schaeffer’s manifesto offers no prescriptions for a Christian society.”
- as a premillennialist, Schaeffer doesn’t expect to win the battle before the return of Christ
- Schaeffer argues for pluralism under the First Amendment where “Reformation Christianity would compete in the free marketplace of ideas” to which N/C state that “religious competition is not a commercial activity”
- when Schaeffer argues against theocracy and for religious liberty he is advocating neutrality; conversely, any argument against neutrality is an argument for theocracy
- North: “*Everyone uses the neutrality doctrine in order to create his own version of theocracy.*”
- North: “*Anyone who really believes in the modern doctrine of religious liberty has no option but to believe in some variant of the myth of neutrality.*”
- N/C now propose three possibilities: (1) Schaeffer is a theocrat; (2) he is a neutralist; (3) he is a schizophrenic
- comparison to *The Communist Manifesto* which was explicitly revolutionary; likewise the *Humanist Manifestos* (1933, 1973) contain a plan of action
- comparison to Nigel Lee’s *Christian Manifesto of 1984*: with this “you could raise an army”
- weaknesses of *CM* as part of a pattern of weakness in apologetics: (1) failure to break with “common ground” philosophy; (2) failure to recognize the eschatological implications of the gospel’s power to transform culture; (3) failure to use biblical law as the basis for personal/social reconstruction
- here N/C add that Schaeffer’s Calvinism is compromised by his unwillingness to mention predestination
- the three weaknesses mentioned lead to three “disastrous” conclusions within the sphere of political theory: (1) religious pluralism; (2) freedom to preach personal salvation but not social reconstruction; (3) satisfaction with “natural” law
- N/C: “We can summarize these three political goals in one phrase: *equal time for Jesus.*”
- Christianity as the best alternative: a view which CVT showed is inconsistent with the Bible—it denies the absolute authority of Christ (this was CVT’s criticism of all “rational” apologetic methods)
- Herbert Schlossberg: the struggle between religious and secular is really the struggle between religions; “In the most basic sense there is no such thing as a secular culture”—not a call for religious war, but a recognition that it’s already underway

- N/C: “The ‘religious pluralism’ allowed in the West from about 1648 on, was possible only because the two warring sides were Christian in perspective. . . . The humanists were isolated in the seventeenth century.” (Italy/France)
- Schaeffer’s apologetic has never made a clean break with the rationalists or the evidentialists
- theocracy as a bottom-up system, not top-down; decentralist; “self-government under the law of God”
- as self-disciplined Christians are brought under the law of God, the institutions follow: family, church, business, government (local, then central)
- the “doctrine of interposition”: reliance on local agencies to challenge the authority of central government (sounds like DOLM, with a twist)
- how to do it? begin with self; learn biblical law; vote in terms of biblical law; use jury nullification . . . and?
- N/C: “Theocracy is government by God’s law—not just in the realm of civil government, but *all* government.”
- Christians must learn to resist *theocratic humanism* which is already the dominant religion in the West: “theocratic humanism is a system of rule by a tiny minority of humanists over a vast majority of confused, intellectually compromised, hesitant Christians.” (here we side with Schaeffer in denying that Christianity is still a majority)
- Rushdoony: “If the victory of Christ is to be eschatological only, and in terms only of an eternal order, then [the book of] Daniel is a monstrous piece of irrelevance.”
- N/C: “*Our apologetic methodology must . . . reflect the all-or-nothing nature of the confrontation between God and Satan.*”
- for Schaeffer, the sovereignty of God is not the “bedrock” of his writings in philosophy; he is avoiding needed confrontation with humanists (by rejecting common-ground philosophy) and fundamentalists (who will be put off by his Calvinism)
- we need a confrontational theology that presses the dichotomy between Christ or chaos, God’s law or tyranny
- four doctrines that are essential to success: (1) God’s sovereignty; (2) the sufficiency of scripture (presuppositional apologetics); (3) an optimistic eschatology; (4) the binding nature of biblical law
- the Christian social alternative must be the goal of any serious Christian resistance movement