

The *SBJT* Forum: Dimensions of Schaeffer's Life and Thought

Editor's note: Readers should be aware of the forum's format. D. A. Carson, Chad Owen Brand, C. Ben Mitchell, Russell D. Moore, and Gregory A. Thornbury have been asked specific questions to which they have provided written responses. These writers are not responding to one another. The journal's goal for the Forum is to provide significant thinkers' views on topics of interest without requiring lengthy articles from these heavily-committed individuals. Their answers are presented in an order that hopefully makes the forum read as much like a unified presentation as possible.

SBJT: Will the legacy of Francis Schaeffer endure? Should it?

D. A. Carson: These are surprisingly difficult questions. Before offering even a feeble attempt at an answer, I should make three qualifying remarks.

First, it will be easier to answer the question about whether or not this legacy will endure if we stipulate how long. Some people read Augustine, more than a millennium and a half after he wrote, and Calvin, almost five centuries after he wrote. I doubt that the kind of contribution made by Francis Schaeffer has that sort of staying power. So let us limit our horizons to a century or two. On the assumption that Jesus does not come back before then, will Schaeffer's legacy last that long?

Second, because there are different estimations of what a legacy is, I must specify my "take" on that matter, or the reasons for my judgment will be obscured. Schaeffer's legacy lies primarily in the field of apologetics. While retaining a robust orthodoxy, he sought to understand and address Western culture, especially the more intellectual and "front edge" elements of that culture.

Third, most prognostications about the future are nothing more than extrapola-

tions of present trends. But trends can change rapidly, provoke reactions, and veer off in new directions. It is not impossible that much of Western evangelicalism, snookered by the most subjective features of postmodern epistemology, will veer off into communal and subjective notions of truth, and dismiss Schaeffer as at best quaint and old fashioned. Alternatively, in his mercy God may raise up a robust reaction to such trends, and in that case Schaeffer will come back into his own.

That brings us to the answers to the pair of questions.

(1) As much as I admire Schaeffer's work, its focus means that it is unlikely to be read as long as some read, for instance, the best commentaries, or the best theologies, or the most pivotal books on Christian theology, or the finest devotional works. This is not in any sense to disparage Schaeffer. Rather, it is to recognize that the focus of his contribution is primarily in the domain of apologetics. That, of course, is why his legacy will not endure half a millennium: apologetics tends to have a fairly short shelf-life, precisely because cultures change.

(2) On the other hand, Schaeffer was one of the first to understand the drift of Western culture toward a kind of episte-

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mological nihilism. Although he died before full-fledged postmodernism took a firm grip on the dominant voices in Western media and intellectual centers, Schaeffer understood the direction in which Western thought was pressing. Moreover, he understood that Christians must simultaneously expose its futility, and offer a full-blown alternative worldview, a worldview that is determined by the Scriptures, by the turning points in redemptive history, by God himself as he has disclosed himself to us. As long as postmodern epistemology fosters various forms of absurdist frames of reference, *Escape from Reason* will remain relevant; as long as the predominant cultural voices insist that all human “knowing” must be disconnected from an omniscient Mind, *He Is There and He Is Not Silent* will be read with profit.

(3) More importantly, Francis Schaeffer’s approach to such questions is perhaps more important than the answers he gave. That approach *should* last for a long time; whether or not it will, I cannot say. That approach was characterized by a combination far too rare: on the one hand, a robust orthodoxy that did not flinch in its eagerness to maintain the whole counsel of God, and, on the other, an extraordinary commitment to “listening” to the culture.

His was the listening that sprang not only from wide reading of books and thoughtful study of trends in art and literature, but, even more importantly, from endless conversation. He listened to people, and engaged them where they were. An entire generation of young people, squeezed between evangelical clichés and cultural malaise, taught him what they were thinking, and learned from him how the gospel transforms

every world—not least theirs.

Some of his would-be heirs and successors simply repeated his answers. That is helpful, of course, but not as helpful as what he himself did: he generated fresh answers out of his deeply-rooted Christian orthodoxy precisely because he kept listening, kept thinking his way through what he was hearing and reading. And we best honor his legacy if we not only listen attentively to the answers he himself gave, but also listen attentively to the dominant voices of our own day, and learn to craft faithful responses.

In short, Schaeffer modeled what Paul well understood. The apostle could preach, on the one hand, to Jews and to Gentile proselytes and God-fearers in the synagogue in Pisidian Anitoch (Acts 13), and then, on the other, to biblical illiterates in Athens (Acts 17:16-34), precisely because he understood both groups, and knew how to shape his proclamation to their need. In retrospect, some of the very freshness of Schaeffer’s language, a freshness that was no small part of the impact he made on many of us thirty years and more ago, already seems slightly strained and artificial. In other words, his actual locutions and formulations are unlikely to endure as long as, say, the more prosaic writings of a John Stott. But I earnestly pray that the model of how he engaged men and women without fear or compromise, with respect yet with boldness, with a listening ear and a faithfully proclaiming voice, will be repeated again and again for many generations.

(4) There is another sense in which his work will endure, of course, and thoughtful Christians must not forget it. Jesus insisted that even a cup of cold water given in his name will receive its reward. How much more a raft of books and tapes

that taught a generation of young men and women how to integrate biblical faith into their lives, so as to be able to respond to a culture teetering on the edge of epistemological nihilism. In the aeons to come, there will be hundreds, perhaps thousands, of redeemed men and women who will rise up and call him blessed for helping them to escape from various intellectual and moral quagmires. That is rebuttal enough of some critics, who have occasionally displayed a finer technical scholarship than Schaeffer could muster, but little of his grace and even less of his passionate ability to communicate the gospel to a generation that cries out for bread, and not for the indigestible stones of mere technical competence removed from the grace of God in the gospel. I can introduce you to mature Christian leaders today who began their Christian pilgrimage under the influence of Schaeffer's writings. I cannot find people who have been similarly transformed by the odd carping critical essay that rather condescendingly writes Schaeffer off because of his generalizations and his occasionally disputable historical or artistic judgments. The transformed lives are part of his legacy. And fifty billion years from now, they will be the most important part.

SBJT: "In what ways did Schaeffer have a kind of prophetic vision of where our culture is now?"

Chad Owen Brand: For me, the '70s were virtually bookended by Francis Schaeffer. I read *The God Who Is There* for the first time in 1972 and my intellectual life was transformed. Though I struggled with some of the ideas in the book and at times I wished the author might have given a bit more background material to explain his assessments, I had the overwhelming

sense that I had crossed over into a new world. Then in 1978 I spent ten successive Thursday nights going to a church in Ft. Worth, Texas, to view the successive installments of the film series, "How Should We Then Live?" At the time it was a *tour de force* in Christian film production, and it convinced me that it was possible not only to make a credible case for Christianity, but that it might also be done in an attractive and compelling format.

Schaeffer was the first apologist I ever read, and his impact on my thinking was profound. But he is more than that. Hegel reminded us that the Owl of Minerva flies at dusk, and if this is so, then one might surmise that the real jolt of Schaeffer's work would not be felt until after he was gone. I personally believe this to be the case. As helpful as he was as a teacher to me when I was eighteen years old, now I read him as a prophet.

Schaeffer was one of the first evangelical thinkers to take note of rising postmodernity, though that term was not *au courant* in his time, and to recognize it for what it was, not what it claimed to be. His criticisms of Samuel Beckett and Mondrian, for example, show that though these postmodern cultural icons claim to be critiquing any possibility for objective truth claims, the fact is that they offer their own tacit affirmations about truth.

He labored as an evangelist. Schaeffer's work might be seen as the reverse of the strategy exercised by postmodern critics such as Herbert Marcuse and Theodore Adorno in the early '60s. These members of the Frankfurt School launched a very caustic critique of all claims to knowledge and truth that stood in the heritage of classical antiquity, of the Christian worldview, or even of modernity. However it may seem to the casual reader of books like

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One-Dimensional Man, though, the goal of these iconoclasts was not the rejection of outmoded forms of discourse so that marginalized speech might finally have its place in cultural life. These men had political ends in view—they wanted to take over the state. In order to do that, of course, they needed to gain a mass following. Knowing that it was highly unlikely that their intellectual concerns would find a sympathetic hearing among either the working class or the bourgeoisie, these left-wing intellectuals turned to university students to obtain a pool of disciples. Marcuse and company knew full well that their stance of negativity toward prevailing institutions and truth claims would find a ready hearing among the disaffected youth of the (mostly) middle class. The result was the student protest movement in places such as Paris, Columbia University, and Berkeley.

Schaeffer's work was an antidote to all of this in two ways. First, in his radical demythologizing of the (post)modern and existentialist myths, Schaeffer lifted the lid off of prevailing ideologies and demonstrated that non-Christians cannot give a unified account of reality. This is especially true of the intellectual traditions of the last century, in which thinking persons, under the spell of Kant, Hegel, and Kierkegaard, have slipped below the "line of despair." Feeling self-conscious about the disarray in their worldview, such persons have thrown a blanket over the chaos to hide it from view, and then have assumed a Protean stance, like James Cagney standing atop a burning building and crying, "I'm on top of the world." American youth in particular had fallen prey to the notion that nihilism was innocuous, a sort of playful exercise. Louis Armstrong, Bobby Darin, and Frank Sinatra all made

hit recordings of the song, "Mack the Knife," a song about a serial murderer, sung to a sprightly tune, putting a sort of happy face on nihilism. (The full version of the song, from Brecht's "Three Penny Opera" is more explicit than the American version.) Schaeffer sought to remove the blanket and let the daylight come streaming in to reveal the fractured character of these newly canonical epistemologies. Without diminishing the lure of relativism and nihilism or downplaying the genuine *angst* of young people in the contemporary world, Francis Schaeffer displayed the vacuity of the postmodern and existentialist "cures." For me, reading Camus, Nietzsche, and Kafka through the decade of the '70s, Schaeffer's sermons kept ringing back: "These men have fallen below the line of despair—they are of no final help to you."

Second, Schaeffer wanted to tell these young persons who have been steeped in Marcuse, Sartre, and Nietzsche that they do not have to sell their souls to the devil of a fractured metaphysic. The answer to the human condition lies not in nihilism, but in the Infinite-Personal God of biblical revelation. This God seeks a relationship with humans through the death and resurrection of his Son, Jesus Christ. Though the church has often obscured the essence of the faith through its traditions, biblical Christianity understood in terms of the Reformation traditions provides the real solution to the human dilemma. We can know that this message is true both because it rings true in our lives and because it is presented in a Book that is absolutely trustworthy. Again, though my own approach to apologetics may not be completely Schaefferian any more, his approach helped me work through issues related to presuppositionalism,

evidentialism, and the classical approach.

Francis Schaeffer the prophet points us the way through the maze of postmodernity. Like other prophets to postmodernity, such as Solzhenitsyn and Alvin Gouldner, he reminds us that the advocates of existentialism and postmodernism are not disinterested, objective observers of the contemporary situation. They rather have adopted a discourse of radical suspicion for the purposes of transforming the moral condition of this world into something more fitting with their own rejection of Judeo-Christian values. Further, in their defense of marginalized discourses, though they appear to be the Robin Hoods of postmodern culture, taking from the bourgeoisie and their intellectual hired guns, in fact, beneath the mask they really are the Sheriff of Nottingham, with political goals of their own. Postmodernity is a power play by humanistic intellectuals for the purposes of intellectuals, and we ought not to be deluded into thinking otherwise.

SBJT: How would you characterize the legacy of Francis Schaeffer?

C. Ben Mitchell: When I reflect on the formative influences on my Christian life, I have to credit Francis Schaeffer as one of my most important mentors. I never met him except through his writings, but his work has shaped my thinking and my ministry in ways I am sure I do not fully realize. Interestingly, Schaeffer's work probably shaped tens of thousands of Christians directly, and millions of Christians indirectly, who grew up spiritually from the 1960s forward.

His legacy is not primarily his intellectual contribution to the Christian faith. Clearly he was a person of huge intellect, but that is not what makes his work most

helpful. After all, as has already been pointed out in these pages, there were places where Schaeffer got it wrong. He also tended to oversimplify and smooth out some important historical and philosophical nuances. Critics of Schaeffer are quick to point out those flaws.

Again, it was not his intellectual contribution that is most important for those who were shaped by Schaeffer's influence. In fact, there were among evangelicals far more astute theologians than Schaeffer. If we keep in mind the apostle's metaphor of the body of Christ in its multi-giftedness, surely Carl F. H. Henry, E. J. Carnell, and J. I. Packer, have contributed more to the "mind" of evangelical theology than Schaeffer.

Though an excellent communicator, Schaeffer's legacy is not as the "voice" of evangelicalism. Billy Graham will for decades remain the preacher of evangelicalism, followed close behind by John R. W. Stott and earlier perhaps by Donald Gray Barnhouse.

The "arms" of evangelicalism have to be people like Kenneth Kantzer, Harold Lindsell, and Harold John Ockenga, in whose embrace American evangelicalism took shape in the mid-twentieth century.

Indeed then, Francis Schaeffer would have to be regarded as one of the "feet" of evangelicalism. That is to say, Schaeffer's passion was to see the gospel of the risen Christ applied to every area of life in such a way as to engage the culture with its life-giving witness. He helped put feet to the gospel. Schaeffer's greatest gift, both through L'Abri and his writings, was to provide a strategy and the courage to invade a culture of hopelessness and meaninglessness with a credible message of hope and meaningfulness.

Schaeffer was also the "eyes" of

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evangelicalism. A keen observer of our age, he analyzed the contours of contemporary society like a skillful cartographer. As an insightful physician of our cultural soul he diagnosed its illnesses with an accuracy that still serves us well.

I first saw Schaeffer's film series, *How Shall We Then Live?*, in the early 1980s in a philosophy of religion class taught by L. Russ Bush at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. Having already read *Escape from Reason*, *The God Who Is There*, and *He Is There and Is Not Silent*, I was well prepared for Schaeffer's survey of the history of Western thought. What I was not prepared for was how he looked. Relatively short of stature, Schaeffer sported a billy-goat's beard, shoulder-length hair, and wore knickers! He was not your average run of the mill evangelical speaker, even in a post-1960s world. Despite his appearance (or maybe because of it), he had a keen ability to make difficult ideas accessible to the average Christian. His gift was not theological novelty. His gift was not philosophical ingenuity. Like C. S. Lewis, Schaeffer was an apologist for his own day and a popularizer of profound truth. Because of his amazing breadth of learning and his penetrating insight into the culture, he was a brilliant diagnostician.

Schaeffer was also prophetic, both in the sense that he "forth-told" the truth and that he "foretold" the direction the culture was going. Just over a decade after I had seen the film series, I myself had the opportunity to show it in a course I taught on philosophy. I was amazed not only at how normal Schaeffer looked (for everyone was wearing a "goatee" by then) but at how accurate his predictions had been.

He foresaw the downward spiral of twentieth-century nihilism, narcissism,

and atomistic autonomy. He predicted something very much like postmodernism even before it became *de rigueur*. He prophesied that art would become pornography and that our culture would become increasingly anti-natal, sacrificing its offspring on the altar of its own crass pleasures.

Beyond diagnosis and prophecy, however, Schaeffer provided strategies to equip Christians to engage their own culture. Schaeffer was no monastic and L'Abri was not a monastery. It was an equipping center. It was a learning community with a goal of transforming individuals through engaging their whole person: mind, heart, and passions, and then sending them out to transform culture.

The ministry of L'Abri has been highly effective. Many Christian leaders have been touched by Schaeffer's ministry. Os Guinness, founder of Trinity Forum ministries, and Lane Dennis, founder of Crossway Books, are only two of many stellar examples of how Schaeffer's ministry has had a lasting impact on evangelicals and the world. Countless others have been shaped by his written work.

In fifty years will history count Francis Schaeffer as one of the great Christian intellectuals of the twentieth century? Probably not. How will he be remembered? He will be remembered as the person under God who motivated Christians to trace the history of ideas, discover the mind of contemporary culture, and penetrate it with a fresh, relevant, precision engagement aimed at transformation. He will be remembered as a Christian activist, in the very best sense of the term.

Contemporary evangelicals would do well to follow Schaeffer's example. In our postmodern world our cultural idols may

have taken slightly different shape, but they are nonetheless the ideological kin of their parents. We need more skilled diagnosticians today, more faithful prophets, more learning communities, more sending stations, and more transformers of culture than ever before. O Lord, give us more Francis Schaeffers!

SBJT: What are the enduring contributions of Francis Schaeffer's thought to an evangelical theology of social and political engagement?

Russell D. Moore: Observers across the ideological spectrum have recognized the influence of Francis Schaeffer on the "Religious Right" political activist movement forged in the 1970s and 1980s. Within the evangelical community, those with broadly divergent understandings of public theology claim Schaeffer's legacy. As such, those who claim the heritage of Schaeffer sometimes range from "Christian America" conservatives to theonomic Reconstructionists to the environmentalist wing of the evangelical political left.

Schaeffer's political thought is usually associated with his *Christian Manifesto*, a call for evangelical action in the public square or with his influential writings against the abortion-rights culture in the United States. Nonetheless, his key contributions may not lie in individual calls-to-arms, but rather in the overarching model of a theologically informed sociopolitical ethic.

The first such contribution would be Schaeffer's emphasis on Christian "worldview" thinking as an inherently theological endeavor. This is especially interesting given Schaeffer's close ties to the two groups most often associated with a fundamentalist isolation from politics: confessional Presbyterianism and "pessi-

mistic" premillennialism. Unlike J. Gresham Machen and others in the Old Princeton and Southern Presbyterian traditions, Schaeffer did not embrace an idea of the "spirituality of the church" that would have sharply segregated the witness of the church in preaching and the sacraments from the witness of Christians in every other endeavor of life. Unlike the (often unfair but often accurate) caricature of his fellow premillennialist fundamentalists, Schaeffer did not see activity in the public square as a useless endeavor for a world hurtling toward the "terminal generation." While Schaeffer stood with the early fundamentalists in contending for the essentials of the faith, which were under attack from mainline liberalism, he rightly maintained that "the fundamentals" were not enough if they were abstracted from a coherent, full-orbed theology.

Instead, Schaeffer joined his voice with that of Carl F. H. Henry and other "new evangelical" theologians in maintaining that the truth of the gospel means that orthodox Christianity must equip believers in "taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ" (2 Cor 10:5b, NASB). This meant that Schaeffer understood that stumbling blocks to divine revelation often included delusional—and even idolatrous—ideologies, none more obviously so than the Marxist thought then enveloping vast regions of Europe and Asia. With such the case, Schaeffer recognized several things that would often be lost on later attempts at Christian political activism.

The first is the insight that culture is more important than politics. Political action is not irrelevant. After all, political authorities have the power to enforce the thought patterns of the culture. But

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political organizing on behalf of the unborn, for instance, is almost useless in a culture that has already decided to redefine personhood. This is why Schaeffer's often-prophetic voice on issues ranging from Rembrandt to Wagner to the Beatles is of such importance. He understood that cultural forces shape public opinion and public opinion shapes legislatures and courts and monarchs. Contemporary evangelicals would do well to understand the precariousness of their position as they lobby for abstinence-only programs in public schools while their children blankly stare at the latest episode of "Friends" in the room next door.

The second insight that evangelicals must retrieve from Schaeffer's thought is his emphasis on the holistic nature of redemption. For Schaeffer, one could not equate political theory or action with evangelism, but at the same time, one could not in many cases sever the two either. As Schaeffer would maintain throughout his ministry one cannot press John 3:16 upon the consciences of the masses without equal attention to Genesis 1:1—"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth." As such, Schaeffer rightly railed against the Platonic captivity of the American church—a church that neatly divided body from soul, material from spiritual, and personal from cosmic. This was the reason for Schaeffer's (at first) lonely voice among evangelicals on the abortion issue. Unlike many pietistic fundamentalists, he recognized the dignity of the human being as both body and soul. He understood that the destruction of the body of the "developing fetus" was more than a medical issue. It represented an assault on the *imago Dei*, and therefore on the Creator Himself. Again, Schaeffer's insight must be recovered if evangelicals

are to push the pro-life vision beyond just the abortion debate to address the crucial questions of human cloning, stem-cell research, and gene patenting.

The same principle applies to Schaeffer's often-overlooked concern for the environment. Unlike many on the environmental left, Schaeffer did not rest his concern for the planet on a secular apocalypticism or an earth-based neopaganism. Instead, he pressed evangelicals to speak against wanton pollution because of the goodness of the created order, the cultural mandate over creation given to humanity in Adam, and the future restoration of this cosmos through the atonement of Christ. Schaeffer's thought here deserves to be heard by evangelicals in a context in which environmental issues are often reduced to shouting matches between executives and the tie-dye-wearing picketers outside corporate headquarters.

Finally, Schaeffer's thought can contribute to American evangelical engagement by reminding evangelicals of the ultimate focus of sociopolitical righteousness in this present age—the community of the church. While the evangelical movement heard Schaeffer's call to public action, it is not clear that his call to a renewed ecclesiology was received with the same enthusiasm. Schaeffer's ministry was marked by a series of controversies within Presbyterian circles—resulting in his membership in a series of splintered Presbyterian communions. In most of these situations, it is hard to see how anything but separation could be a viable option. Nonetheless, Schaeffer's son, novelist Frank Schaeffer, now ridicules the factiousness and division within his home churches—noting that his longing for the one, holy, catholic, and apostolic church

has led him into the arms of Eastern orthodoxy. Francis Schaeffer, however, especially near the end of his career, pleaded with evangelicals to renew the church as a sign before the watching world of the kind of peace, love, righteousness, and truth that will characterize the coming Kingdom of Christ. This is perhaps the most important contribution that Schaeffer could give. Even as evangelicals register to vote and lobby their legislator (and they should), they should keep in mind that the “city on a hill” is not the United States Capitol. It is the gathered congregations of the crucified and resurrected Messiah. As such, the first priority of any attempt at an evangelical public theology should not be a “movement” or a “crusade,” but a church.

SBJT: Did Francis Schaeffer offer an accurate portrayal of Thomas Aquinas’s theology?

Gregory Alan Thornbury: The answer to this question possesses significance given the weight Schaeffer places on Thomas’s epistemology in explaining the rise of the modern division between faith and reason. Schaeffer’s own idiosyncratic method of dispatching complex philosophical and historical developments in a few sentences exacerbates the matter.¹ The issue evidently caused enough interest several years ago to warrant a *Christianity Today* cartoon, which depicted Francis Schaeffer at the Pearly Gates. Looking through the great purported book of life, St. Peter says upon finding the Reformed evangelist’s name, “Let’s see . . . Schaeffer, Dr. Francis. I think Thomas Aquinas would like to have a word with you.” Did Schaeffer misrepresent Thomas’s theological contribution?

Although Schaeffer touches on the

work of Thomas at various points in his written work, his fundamental assessment of the great theological mind comes from *Escape from Reason and How Should We Then Live?* In the former, Schaeffer wrote:

In Aquinas’s view the will of man was fallen, but the intellect was not. From this incomplete view of the biblical Fall flowed subsequent difficulties. Out of this as time passed, man’s intellect was seen as autonomous. . . . From the basis of this autonomous principle, philosophy also became increasingly free, and was separated from revelation.²

On Schaeffer’s account, the result of Thomas’s view was the conceptual separation of philosophy from theology, an idea that led to the eventual divorce of philosophy from biblical revelation. No one disputes that the division took place during the Enlightenment. The contest revolves around the *origin* for the division. Thomists lay the blame later in the 14th century at the feet of William of Ockham. Reformed theologians typically claim that the seeds of the idea find roots preliminarily in Aquinas, and thus consider him to be proto-modern.

For his part, Schaeffer contended that Thomas’s conceptual distinction between philosophy and theology emanated from an unbiblical view of the Fall. But what should one make of Schaeffer’s statement that Thomas taught that the will was fallen, but that intellect was not? What shall we say to his conclusion that Aquinas fathered a set of ideas that set the stage for the modern turn in philosophy? The answer to the former question is that, technically speaking, Schaeffer misinterprets Thomas. What Schaeffer’s argument lacks in technical merit, however, it makes up in the realm of intuitive application of the data. In other words, while Schaeffer’s

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interpretation (i.e., Aquinas considered the will fallen but not the intellect) is overstated, his conclusion (i.e., Aquinas's conceptual distinction between philosophy and theology opened a door to the modern turn of philosophy away from biblical revelation) contains valuable insights.

With such prolegomena stated, let's assess Schaeffer's commentary. First, nowhere in his voluminous written corpus does Thomas explicitly say that the will is fallen, but the intellect is not. To the contrary, Thomas argues in Q. 85, Art. 3 of the *Summa*:

[T]here was a time when original justice enabled reason to have complete control over the powers of the soul, and when reason itself was subject to God and made perfect by him. But original justice was lost through the sin of our first parent. . . . In consequence, all powers of the soul have been left to some extent destitute of their own proper order, by which they are naturally inclined to virtue. It is this destitution which we call "a wound of nature." . . . Insofar as reason has lost the way to truth, there is a wound of ignorance. Insofar as the will is lost its inclination to good, there is the wound of malice. Insofar as the irascible power has lost its aggressiveness toward the difficult, there is the wound of weakness. Finally, insofar as desire is no longer directed to the delectable under the restraint of reason, there is the wound of desire.³

On the basis of the above passage and others similar to it, Schaeffer's assessment oversimplifies theological anthropology as explained by Thomas. Having offered such a critical appraisal of Schaeffer's position does not require that one deny his conclusion about Thomas's influence upon the history of philosophy. To the contrary, Thomas exhibits great optimism about the powers of human reason apart from the direct influence of divine revela-

tion. The crucial matter is not, as Schaeffer described it, whether or not the intellect was fallen in Thomas's view. The issue relates to the *extent* or *radicality* of the Fall in Thomas's theology. If one undertakes the matter on these grounds, then it is clear from Thomas's writings that although the author of the *Summa* allowed that the intellect was fallen, his position essentially contended that the intellect is not *radically* fallen. Numerous examples could demonstrate this conclusion. The most famous, of course, comes from Aquinas's assertion that the following propositions may be known apart from divine revelation: that God exists, that God is one, and that the soul is immortal. "For it is evident that the intellect can know by natural knowledge," Thomas contends, "some things above itself, as it manifestly does in the natural knowledge of God."⁴

According to Thomas, theology—as distinct from philosophy—reveals to us those matters which can only be known by faith (e.g., the Trinity and the Incarnation). This sentiment pervades Thomas's work: that faith begins to answer metaphysical questions at the point pure reason encounters slow going. As such, in Book One of *Summa Contra Gentiles*, Thomas leaves the impression that it is *possible* for the unaided human mind to make steady progress in the knowledge of God apart from faith. But one gains such knowledge only through arduous contemplation and study—a condition that, on Thomas's account, eliminates most human beings. Add to that obstacle "A third disadvantage . . . that, owing to the infirmity of our judgment and the perturbing force of imagination, there is some admixture of error in most of the investigations of human reason," and Thomas

concludes, “Wholesome therefore is the arrangement of divine clemency, whereby things even that reason can investigate are commanded to be held on faith, so that all might easily be partakers of the knowledge of God, and that without doubt and error.” In sum, Thomas held that although it is *possible* to obtain knowledge of the divinity purely through rational demonstration, it is not *likely* such a scenario will obtain. Consequently, it is suitable for persons to believe on the basis of faith.⁵ Despite his high estimation of faith, Thomas maintained a categorical possibility for reason as a source of authority alongside revelation.

Although Schaeffer oversimplified Thomas’s views, he nonetheless offered a perceptive insight. In important respects, Thomas was the progenitor of the modern world. Although he eschewed the concept of infinite regress, he reintroduced the idea into philosophical consideration—an idea to which David Hume would later return and utilize to counter Thomas’s very objections to the concept. By separating philosophy and theology into distinct categories, Thomas raised the possibility that metaphysical truths could be arrived at apart from an explicit concept of divine revelation. Having entertained the allure of the autonomy of philosophy, both rationalist and empiricist philosophers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw a decreasing need for the theological categories that Thomas held dear. In sum, what Schaeffer’s argument lacks in technical merit, it gains in historical applicability.

ENDNOTES

¹Schaeffer’s brief summaries of philosophical ideas are due to the likelihood that Schaeffer read few primary sources.

This conclusion is anecdotally made on the basis of separate conversations the author has had with two of Schaeffer’s closest associates during his career. According to one of these sources, Schaeffer’s ideas came largely from perceptive intuitions gained from magazine and journal reading.

²Francis Schaeffer, *Escape from Reason*, vol. 1, *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer* (Wheaton: Crossway, 1984) 211.

³Thomas Aquinas, *Nature and Grace: Selections from the Summa Theologica of Thomas Aquinas*, ed. A. M. Fairweather (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1954) 130.

⁴*Ibid.*, 143.

⁵Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* in Daniel Kolak, ed., *The Philosophy Source: Classic Masterworks on CD-ROM* [CD-Rom database]: Wadsworth Publishing Co., 2001.