

# Schaeffer's *A Christian Manifesto*: Dated Yet Relevant

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**T**he writings of Francis Schaeffer made a substantial impact on many—including on me. I first read *The God Who Is There* in college, and I was hooked. As I read, I sensed a deep yearning to explain the world from a Christian perspective. I realized a Christian could think seriously about philosophy, art, music, truth, and culture.

In seminary I read *How Then Shall We Live?* and attended Dr. Schaeffer's movie series by the same name. The excitement of seeing Schaeffer in person and reflecting on how history developed from the Reformation to the then present realities of Western culture sparked an interest in the role history could play in apologetics.

In my first pastorate in a small Presbyterian Church in Pennsylvania I experienced an epiphany while I was trying to figure out how to do ministry. I again was reading Schaeffer. This time it was *A Christian Manifesto*.<sup>1</sup> It was riveting. Schaeffer's prophetic power compelled me to action. I had never considered the significance of the legalization of abortion for the American experiment in republican government. Convicted of my indifference to the issue and my lack of activity or teaching concerning the unborn, an interest in public theology was born. My resolve to defend the unborn and to increase

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<sup>1</sup> Francis A. Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto* (Westchester, IL: Crossway, 1981). © 1981, pp. 44–45, 99–109, 117–24, 126–30. Used by permission of Crossway, a publishing ministry of Good News Publishers, Wheaton, IL 60187, [www.crossway.org](http://www.crossway.org).

the impact of Christianity on the nation were born in 1983 in my little pastor's study. Bringing the Christian perspective in the public square has been a significant facet of my ministry since. Hence, I am grateful to introduce this issue of *Unio cum Christo* given its focus on public theology.

## I. *Gone but Not Forgotten*

If Schaeffer's *Manifesto* had relevance to me and many others almost forty years ago, is it relevant today? After all, his ministry concluded in 1984 after a six-year battle with cancer, just three years after the *Manifesto* was published.<sup>2</sup> Clearly, his writings live on, but the book is dated—much has happened in the intervening years not only pertaining to issues of abortion but concerning many other national moral debates such as same-sex marriage, gender, religious liberty, law enforcement, and race relations.

Nevertheless, Schaeffer's work and thought have not been forgotten. In fact, Schaeffer's *Manifesto* was the introduction to a recent open letter to American pastors by Larry Alex Taunton, who declares,

A generation ago, pastor and theologian Francis Schaeffer issued a call-to-arms to the American Church in an explosive little book titled *A Christian Manifesto* (1981). Alarmed by the slaughter of the unborn in the wake of *Roe v. Wade*, Schaeffer called for social action in the form of civil disobedience. The problem as he saw it was a passive, inert, and ineffective church. Corpulent and self-satisfied, it had become the proverbial salt that had lost its savor. According to Schaeffer, this was due to weak pastoral leadership:

As we turn to the evangelical leadership in the last decades, unhappily we must come to the conclusion that often it has not been of much help .... Spirituality to the evangelical leadership has often not included the Lordship of Christ over the whole spectrum of life .... The old revivals are spoken about so warmly by the evangelical leadership. Yet they seem to have forgotten what those revivals were. Yes, the old revivals in Great Britain, Scandinavia, and the old revivals in this country did call, and without any question and with tremendous clarity, for personal salvation. But they also called for a resulting social action. Every single one of them did this ...

Schaeffer's indictment of America's pastors should not upset too many of you since, as old as it is, there are very few of that generation who remain in our pulpits. But were Schaeffer still alive, I fear the knicker-wearing theologian with the Van Dyke beard would be fiercer than ever in light of our current cultural predicament.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For an insightful personal look at Schaeffer's life and teaching, see William Edgar, *Schaeffer on the Christian Life: Countercultural Spirituality* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013).

<sup>3</sup> Larry Alex Taunton, "A Letter to Americas Pastors and Churches," July 16, 2020, <https://larryalextaunton.com/2020/07/a-letter-to-americas-pastors-churches/>.

## II. *Emphases Driving Schaeffer's Manifesto: Revolution and Presuppositions*

To reclaim Schaeffer's *Manifesto* and appreciate its relevance for the church today, we will summarize its argument. But first, to understand the abiding character of his moral vision for this generation, we must grasp two prior concerns of his general perspective on the church and apologetics. Simply put, the *Manifesto* emerges from his call for revolution in the church and a commitment to presuppositional apologetics. These concerns drive Schaeffer's *Manifesto*, energizing its tone and shaping its method. The *Manifesto* is the climax of Schaeffer's cry for revolution, reformation, and revival in the American church:

Being Christian means affirming certain doctrines, but it also means having a mentality attuned to what God has shown us in His book about the realities of history. And this must be our perspective, for only as men turn back to the One who can really fulfill, return to His revelation, and reaffirm the possibility of having a relationship with Him as He has provided the way through Jesus Christ, can they have the sufficient comfort which every man longs for. There is no other way. And if we aren't totally convinced that there is *no* other way, we are not ready for a reformation and revival. We are not ready for the revolution that will shake the evangelical church. If I think there are other final answers in the areas of art, history, psychology, sociology, philosophy, or whatever my subject and whatever my discipline; if I think there are other answers after man has turned away from God, I am not ready for the reformation, the revival, and the revolution—the constructive revolution—which the evangelical church so desperately needs. Our perspective must be the perspective of the Word of God. ...

Therefore, in a post-Christian world and in an often post-Christian church, it is imperative to point out with love where apostasy lies. We must openly discuss with all who will listen, treating all men as fellow men, but we must call apostasy, apostasy. If we do not do that, we are not ready for reformation, revival, and a revolutionary church in the power of the Holy Spirit.

We are all too easily infiltrated with relativism and synthesis in our own day. We tend to lack antithesis. There is that which is true God, and there is that which is no god. God is there as against His not being there. That's the big antithesis. ... When we see men ignore or pervert the truth of God, we must say clearly—not in hate or anger—"You are wrong."<sup>4</sup>

And similarly, to understand Schaeffer's *Manifesto*, we must appreciate his deep concern for presuppositional apologetics. In his assessment, it is essential to recognize the underlying faith and assumptions of both the Christian and the non-Christian confronting the church if there is to be the

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<sup>4</sup> Francis Schaeffer, *Death in the City*, in *The Complete Works of Francis Schaeffer*, vol. 4, *A Christian View of the Church*, 2nd ed. (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 1985), 224, 228.

needed revolution, reformation, and revival. Without recognition of the presuppositions that are vying for control of the mind and the public square, one cannot effectively come to grips with the fact that God and his absolutes truly exist. Given the post-Kantian milieu of the West, Schaeffer often addressed the deep dichotomy between what he termed the upper story and lower story expressions of knowledge resulting from post-Enlightenment-shaped thinking. Without the believer's cognition of secular presuppositions, the unbelieving world mystifies the Christian and disregards his message.

Hence, for Schaeffer, philosophical clarity about the world's presuppositions and the impact they are making on the church is foundational to the achievement of the revolution needed in the church.

Confusion becomes bewilderment, and before long they are overwhelmed. This is unhappily true not only of young people, but of many pastors, Christian educators, evangelists and missionaries as well.

*So this change in the concept of the way we come to knowledge and truth is the most crucial problem, as I understand it, facing Christianity today.*

If you had lived in Europe, let us say prior to about 1890, or in the United States before about 1935, you would not have had to spend much time, in practice, in thinking about your presuppositions. ...

What were these presuppositions? The basic one was that there really are such things as absolutes. They accepted the possibility of an absolute in the area of Being (or *knowledge*), and in the area of *morals*. Therefore, because they accepted the possibility of absolutes, though people might have disagreed as to what these were, nevertheless they could reason together on the classical basis of antithesis. They took it for granted that if anything was true, the opposite was false. In morality, if one thing was right, its opposite was wrong. ... If you understand the extent to which this no longer holds sway, you will understand our present situation.

Absolutes imply antithesis. The non-Christian went on romantically operating on this basis without a sufficient cause, an adequate base, for doing so. Thus it was still possible to discuss what was right and wrong, what was true and false. ...

The shift has been tremendous. Thirty or more years ago you could have said such things as "This is true" or "This is right," and you would have been on everybody's wavelength. People may or may not have thought out their beliefs consistently, but everyone would have been talking to each other as though the idea of antithesis was correct. Thus in evangelism, in spiritual matters and in Christian education, you could have begun with the certainty that your audience understood you.

#### *Presuppositional Apologetics Would Have Stopped the Decay*

It was indeed unfortunate that our Christian "thinkers," in the time before the shift took place and the chasm was fixed, did not teach and preach with a clear grasp of presuppositions. Had they done this, they would not have been taken by surprise, and they could have helped young people to face their difficulties. The really foolish thing is that even now, years after the shift is complete, many Christians still do not know what is happening. And this is because they are still not being taught the importance of thinking in terms of presuppositions, especially concerning truth.

The flood-waters of secular thought and liberal theology overwhelmed the Church because the leaders did not understand the importance of combating a false set of presuppositions. ...

The use of classical apologetics before this shift took place was effective only because non-Christians were functioning, on the surface, on the same presuppositions, even if they had an inadequate base for them. In classical apologetics though, presuppositions were rarely analyzed, discussed or taken into account.<sup>5</sup>

### **III. *Selections from Schaeffer's A Christian Manifesto Illustrating His Argument***

Thus, the rationale for Schaeffer's *Manifesto* becomes clear. A true revolution calls for a manifesto to explain its commitments. His revolution demanded a sweeping change within the evangelical world by a spiritual revolution to bring God back to the center of all reality. This presuppositional clarity in turn revealed the utter contrast between reality defined by the personal God of Scripture and the secular world that entirely disregarded God and his truth. And such a dynamic revolution of the church, the mind, and the interaction of Christian and non-Christian, necessarily called for a change in secular culture and its values. Nowhere could this revolution by the Christian church be more dramatic than in the antithesis between the Christian's belief in the sanctity of life and the world's celebration of death—the death of the unborn by legalized abortion. From this perspective, the abiding importance and relevance of Schaeffer's *Manifesto* for Christians and the church today become evident.

*A Christian Manifesto* is composed of ten chapters that provide the rationale and structure for a revolution within the church that sought to mobilize, confront, and change a nation in the clutches of humanist religion that celebrated the destruction of the unborn. A recital of the chapter titles gives a clear sense of his aims for public theology concerning the sanctity of life:

1. The Abolition of Truth and Morality
2. Foundations for Faith and Freedom
3. The Destruction of Faith and Freedom
4. The Humanist Religion
5. Revival, Revolution, and Reform
6. An Open Window
7. The Limits of Civil Obedience

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<sup>5</sup> Francis Schaeffer, *The God Who Is There*, in *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer*, vol. 1, *A Christian View of Philosophy and Culture*, 6–7.

8. The Use of Civil Disobedience
9. The Use of Force
10. By Teaching, by Life, by Action

Given Schaeffer's gift of passionate analysis, it is preferable to let him speak for himself. Thus, we will offer several selections from his *Manifesto* each introduced by a summary title in italics.

### 1. *Materialistic Philosophy*

Schaeffer's cultural and presuppositional revolution begins with confronting the "philosophical change to the materialistic concept of final reality"<sup>6</sup> that has occurred in the Western world. He explains,

[44] This shift was based on no addition to the facts known. It was a choice, in faith, to see things that way. No clearer expression of this could be given than Carl Sagan's arrogant statement on public television—made without any scientific proof for the statement—to 140 million viewers: "The cosmos is all that is or ever was or ever will be." He opened the series, *Cosmos*, with this essentially creedal declaration and went on to build every subsequent conclusion upon it.

There is exactly the same parallel in law. The materialistic-energy, chance concept of final reality never would have produced the form and freedom in government we have in this country and in other Reformation countries. But now it has arbitrarily and arrogantly supplanted the historic Judeo-Christian consensus that provided the base for form and freedom in government. The Judeo-Christian consensus gave [45] greater freedoms than the world has ever known, but it also contained the freedoms so that they did not pound society to pieces. The materialistic concept of reality would not have produced the form-freedom balance, and now that it has taken over it cannot maintain the balance. It has destroyed it.

... The Durants received the 1976 Humanist Pioneer Award. In *The Humanist* magazine of February 1977, Will Durant summed up the humanist problem with regard to personal ethics and social order: "Moreover, we shall find it no easy task to mold a natural ethic strong enough to maintain moral restraint and social order without the support of supernatural consolations, hopes, and fears."

Poor Will Durant! It is not just difficult, it is impossible. He should have remembered the quotation ... from the agnostic Renan .... Renan said in 1866: "If Rationalism wishes to govern the world without regard to the religious need of the soul, the experience of the French Revolution is there to teach us the consequences of such a blunder." ... And the Durants themselves say in the same context: "There is no significant example in history, before our time, of a society successfully maintaining moral life without the aid of religion."

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<sup>6</sup> Schaeffer, *A Christian Manifesto*, 44. The numbers in brackets within the quotations are to the page numbers from which the quotations are taken.

## 2. Samuel Rutherford, the Reformation, and Civil Disobedience

Schaeffer appeals to the Protestant Reformation for the development of the concept of civil disobedience, showing its relevance for the American context. His understanding of an activist church confronting the humanistic culture at war with the God of the Bible finds its intellectual exemplar in the thought of the Scotsman Samuel Rutherford, whose *Lex, Rex* influenced the American Revolution.

[99] Thus, in almost every place where the Reformation flourished there was not only religious noncompliance; there was civil disobedience as well.

It was in this setting that Samuel Rutherford ... wrote his *Lex Rex: or The Law and the Prince* (1644). What is the concept in *Lex Rex*? Very simply: The law is king, and if the king and the government disobey the law they are to be disobeyed. And the law is founded on the Law of God. *Lex Rex* was outlawed in both England and Scotland. The parliament of Scotland was meeting in order to condemn Samuel Rutherford to death for his views, and the only reason he was not executed as a civil rebel is because he died first.

In his classic work, *Lex Rex*, Rutherford set forth the proper Christian response to nonbiblical acts by the state. ... *Lex Rex*, [100] in a society of landed classes and monarchy, created an immediate controversy.

The governing authorities were concerned about *Lex Rex* because of its attack on the undergirding foundation of seventeenth century political government in Europe—"the divine right of kings." ... Rutherford, argued, all men, even the king, are under the Law and not above it. This concept was considered political rebellion and punishable as treason.

Rutherford argued that Romans 13 indicates that all power is from God and that government is ordained and instituted by God. The state, however, is to be administered according to the principles of God's Law. Acts of the state which contradicted God's Law were illegitimate and acts of tyranny. Tyranny was defined as ruling without the sanction of God.

Rutherford held that a tyrannical government is always immoral. He said that "a power ethical, politic, or moral, to oppress, is not from God, and is not a power, but a licentious deviation of a power; and is no more from God, but from sinful nature and the old serpent, than a license to sin."

[101] Rutherford presents several arguments to establish the right and duty of resistance to unlawful government. *First*, since tyranny is satanic, not to resist it is to resist God—to resist tyranny is to honor God. *Second*, since the ruler is granted power conditionally, it follows that the people have the power to withdraw their sanction if the proper conditions are not fulfilled. The civil magistrate ... holds his authority in trust for the people. Violation of the trust gives the people a legitimate base for resistance.

It follows from Rutherford's thesis that citizens have a moral obligation to resist unjust and tyrannical government. While we must always be subject to the office of the magistrate, we are not to be subject to the man in that office who commands that which is contrary to the Bible.

.... Only when the magistrate acts in such a way that the governing structure of the country is being destroyed—that is, when he is attacking the fundamental structure of society—is he to be relieved of his power and authority.

That is exactly what we are facing today. The whole structure of our society is being attacked and destroyed. It is being given an entirely opposite base [102] which gives exactly opposite results. The reversal is much more total and destructive than that which Rutherford or any of the Reformers faced in their day.

### **3. Rutherford's Perspective on Civil Disobedience Is Still Legitimate**

Schaeffer insisted, then, that there are times when civil disobedience is a legitimate step for a Christian. He writes,

[103] Civil disobedience is, of course, a very serious matter and it must be stressed that Rutherford was the very opposite of an anarchist. In *Lex Rex* he does not propose armed revolution as an automatic solution. Instead, he sets forth the appropriate response to interference by the state in the liberties of the citizenry. Specifically, he states that if the state deliberately is committed to destroying its ethical commitment to God then resistance is appropriate.

In such an instance, for *the private person*, the individual, Rutherford suggested that there are three appropriate levels of resistance: *First*, he must defend himself by protest (in contemporary society this would most often be by legal action); *second*, he must flee if at all possible; and *third*, he may use force, if necessary, to defend himself. One should not employ force [104] if he may save himself by flight; nor should one employ flight if he can save himself and defend himself by protest and the employment of constitutional means of redress. Rutherford illustrated this pattern of resistance from the life of David as it is recorded in the Old Testament.

On the other hand, when the state commits illegitimate acts against *a corporate body*—such as a duly constituted state or local body, or even a church—then flight is often an impractical and unrealistic means of resistance. Therefore, with respect to a corporate group or community, there are two levels of resistance: remonstrance (or protest) and then, if necessary, force employed in self-defense. In this respect, Rutherford cautioned that a distinction must be made between a lawless uprising and lawful resistance.

For *a corporate body* (a civil entity), when illegitimate state acts are perpetrated upon it, resistance should be under the protection of the duly constituted authorities: if possible, it should be under the rule of the lesser magistrates (local officials). Rutherford urged that the *office* of the local official is just as much from God as is the *office* of the highest state official.

### **4. John Locke, John Witherspoon, and Os Guinness on the Legitimate Use of "Force"**

[105] [John] Locke, though secularizing *Lex Rex* and the Presbyterian tradition, nevertheless drew heavily from it. Locke made four basic points:

1. inalienable rights;
2. government by consent;
3. separation of powers;
4. the right of revolution (or you could word it, the right to resist unlawful authority).



These were the four points of Locke which were acted [106] upon by the men among the American Founders who followed Locke.

[John] Witherspoon certainly knew Samuel Rutherford's writing well. The other Founding Fathers may have known him. They certainly knew about Locke. And for both *Lex Rex* and Locke there comes a time when there must be civil disobedience on the appropriate level. One begins not on the highest level, but on the appropriate level at one's own point of history.

Many within the Christian community would agree that Christians can protest and take flight in the face of state oppression. However, force of any kind is a place where many Christians stop short.

*Force*, as used in this book, means *compulsion* or *constraint* exerted upon a person (or persons) or on an entity such as the state.

When discussing force it is important to keep an axiom in mind: always before protest or force is used, we must work for reconstruction. In other words, we should attempt to correct and rebuild society before we advocate tearing it down or disrupting it.

If there is a legitimate reason for the use of force, and if there is a vigilant precaution against its overreaction in practice, then at a certain point a use of force is justifiable. We should recognize, however, that overreaction can too easily become the ugly horror of sheer violence. Therefore, the distinction between force and violence is crucial. Os Guinness in *The Dust of Death* writes: [107] "Without such a distinction there can be no legitimate justification for authority or discipline of any kind, whether on a parental or on a presidential level. In a fallen world the ideal of legal justice without the exercise of force is naïve. Societies need a police force, a man has the right to defend his wife from assault. A feature of any society which can achieve a measure of freedom within form is that responsibility implies discipline. This is true at the various structural levels of society—in the sphere of the state, business, the community, the school, respectively."<sup>7</sup>

In a fallen world, force in some form will always be necessary. We must not forget that every presently existing government uses and must use force in order to exist. Two principles, however, must always be observed. *First*, there must be a legitimate basis and a legitimate exercise of force. *Second*, any overreaction crosses the line from force to violence. And unmitigated violence can never be justified.

As Knox and Rutherford illustrate, however, the proper use of force is not only the province of the state. Such an assumption is born of naïveté. It leaves us without sufficient remedy when and if the state takes on totalitarian dimensions.

One factor today that is different from Rutherford's day is that due to the immense power of the modern state there may be no place to flee. The Pilgrims could escape tyranny by fleeing to America. ...

[108] At this time in our history, protest is our most viable alternative. This is because in our country the freedom that allows us to use protest to the maximum still exists. However, we must realize that protest is a form of force. This is very much so with the so-called "nonviolent resistance." This was, and is not a negation of force, but a choice of the kind of force to be used.

In our day an illustration for the need of protest is tax money being used for abortion. After all the normal constitutional means of protest had been exhausted, then what could be done? At some point protest could lead some Christians to refuse to pay some portion of their tax money. Of course, this would mean a trial. Such a

<sup>7</sup> Os Guinness, *The Dust of Death* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1973), 177–78.

move would have to be the individual's choice under God. No one should decide for another. But somewhere along the way, such a decision might easily have to be faced. Happily, at the present time in the United States the Hyde Amendment has removed the use of national tax money for abortions, but that does not change the possibility that in some cases such a protest would be the only way to be heard. One can think, for example, of the tax money going to Planned Parenthood which is openly a propaganda agency for abortion.

[109] The problem in relation to a state public school system is not just an abstract possibility. As I write, a case of undue entanglement and interference is in the courts in a situation that corresponds exactly to Samuel Rutherford's concept of the proper procedure for a *corporate body* to resist.

[117] There does come a time when force, even physical force, is appropriate. ... This was the situation of the American Revolution. The colonists used force in defending themselves. Great Britain, because of its policy toward the colonies, was seen as a foreign power invading America. The colonists defended their homeland. As such, the American Revolution was a conservative counter-revolution. The colonists saw the British as the revolutionaries trying to overthrow the legitimate colonial governments ....

A true Christian in Hitler's Germany and in the occupied countries should have defied the false and [118] counterfeit state and hidden his Jewish neighbors from the German SS Troops. The government had abrogated its authority, and it had no right to make any demands.

This brings us to a current issue that is crucial for the future of the church in the United States—the issue of abortion. What is involved is the whole issue of the value of human life. A recent report indicates that for every three live births, one child is aborted. Christians must come to the children's defense, and Christians must come to the defense of human life as such.

## 5. *The Christian's Fourfold Defense of the Unborn*

[118] [The defense of the unborn] should be carried out on at least four fronts:

*First*, we should aggressively support a human life bill or a constitutional amendment protecting unborn children.

*Second*, we must enter the courts seeking to overturn the Supreme Court's abortion decision.

*Third*, legal and political action should be taken against hospitals and abortion clinics that perform abortions.

In order to operate, many hospitals and abortion clinics receive tax money in some form—at least from individual states. Our representatives must be confronted with political force (if they will not do so out of principle) into introducing legislation cutting off such funds. If this fails, then lawsuits should be initiated to stop such funds from flowing to such institutions. [119] Simultaneously with these steps, some Christians have picketed ....

[120] *Fourth*, the State must be made to feel the presence of the Christian community.

State officials must know that we are serious about stopping abortion, which is a matter of clear principle concerning the babies themselves and concerning a high

view of human life. This may include doing such things as sit-ins in legislatures and courts, including the Supreme Court, when other constitutional means fail. We must make people aware that this is not a political game, but totally crucial and serious. And we must also demonstrate to people that there is indeed a proper *bottom line*. To repeat: the *bottom line* is that at a certain point there is not only the right, but the duty, to disobey the state.

## 6. Four Reasons Why Civil Disobedience Is “Scary”

[120] Of course, this is scary. There are at least four reasons why.

*First*, we must make definite that we are in no way talking about any kind of theocracy. Let me say that with great emphasis. Witherspoon, Jefferson, the American founders had no idea of a theocracy. That is made plain by the First Amendment ...

[121] We must not confuse the Kingdom of God with our country. ... “We should not wrap Christianity in our national flag.”

*Second*, it is frightening when we realize that our consideration of these things, and this book, will certainly [122] get behind the Iron Curtain and into other tyrannical countries where Christians face these questions in practice every day of their lives, in prison or out of prison. Their position is very different from ours. We have freedom from physical oppression and they do not. ... Jan Pit in *Persecution: It Will Never Happen Here?*<sup>2</sup> writes about one of the restrictions on religious freedom in Iron Curtain countries: “Christians are forbidden to teach religion to children; therefore Sunday schools and youth gatherings are not allowed. Even within the home, Christian training is not to take place.” That clearly disobeys God’s commands—as well as the parent’s deepest longings if indeed [123] the parents believe Christ is the way of eternal life—and the law would have to be disobeyed. Civil disobedience in that case would be continuing the instruction and, if apprehended, paying the price of being sent to the labor camps in Siberia, which at times still means certain death, and certainly suffering. ...

[124] *Third*, speaking of civil disobedience is frightening because of an opposite situation from the second. That is, with the prevalence of Marxist thinking—and especially with the attempted synthesis of Marxism and Christianity in certain forms of liberation theology in South America and other places—what we are saying could become a Marxist and terrorist tool to bring anarchy. ...

[126] And *fourth*, we must say that speaking of civil disobedience is frightening because there are so many kooky people around. People are always irresponsible in a fallen world. ... Anarchy is never appropriate.

But these very real problems do not change the principle that the men of the Reformation and the Founding Fathers of the United States knew and operated on. This principle is that there is a *bottom line* that must be faced squarely if the state is not to become all-powerful and usurp God’s primacy. We must recognize that there is a *bottom line if we are to have real freedom of thought and action at the present time—even if, happily, we never reach that bottom line*. If we have not faced the possibility of civil disobedience, if needed, our thinking and action at the present time will lack the freedom they should have. Locke understood that. [127] Without the possibility of his fourth point—the right to resist unlawful authority—the other three would have been meaningless ....

## 7. America's Declaration of Independence Illustrates the Legitimacy of Civil Disobedience

[127] The colonists followed Rutherford's model in the American Revolution. They elected representatives from every state who, by way of the Declaration of Independence, protested the acts of Great Britain. Failing that, they defended themselves by force.

The Declaration of Independence contains many elements of the Reformation thinking of Knox and Rutherford and should be carefully considered when discussing resistance. It speaks directly to the responsibility of citizens concerning oppressive civil government.

After recognizing man's God-given rights, the Declaration goes on to declare that whenever civil government becomes destructive of these rights, "it is the right of the people to alter and abolish it, and institute new government, laying its foundation on such principles, and organizing its power in such [128] form, as to them shall seem most likely to effect their safety and happiness." The Founding Fathers, in the spirit of *Lex Rex*, cautioned in the Declaration of Independence that established governments should not be altered or abolished for "light and transient causes." But when there is a "long train of abuses and usurpations" designed to produce an oppressive, authoritarian state, "it is their right, it is their duty, to throw off such government ..."

Simply put, the Declaration of Independence states that the people, if they find that their basic rights are being systematically attacked by the state, have a duty to try to change that government, and if they cannot do so, to abolish it.

Numerous historians have noted the strong religious influence on the American Revolution. ... [Perry Miller] concluded in *Nature's Nation*: "Actually, European deism was an exotic plant in America, which never struck roots in the soil. 'Rationalism' was never so widespread as liberal historians, or those fascinated by Jefferson, have imagined. The basic fact is that the Revolution had been preached to the masses as a religious revival, and had the astounding fortune to succeed."

The importance of America's clergy has been too often ignored as a primary factor in the coming revolution [129] and the support of it. They were called the "black regiment"—referring to their clerical robes—of the revolution. Professor Miller's words are vitally important:

[We] still do not realize how effective were generations of Protestant preaching in evoking patriotic enthusiasm. No interpretation of the religious utterances as being merely sanctimonious window dressing will do justice to the facts or to the character of the populace. Circumstances and the nature of the dominant opinion in Europe made it necessary for the official statement [that is, Declaration of Independence] to be released in primarily "Political" terms—the social compact, inalienable rights, the right of revolution. But those terms, in and by themselves, would never have supplied the drive to victory, however mightily they weighed with the literate minority. What carried the ranks of militia and citizens was the universal persuasion that they, by administering to themselves a spiritual purge, acquired the energies God has always, in the manner of the Old Testament, been ready to impart to His repentant children.

And we must again remember the *Wall Street Journal's* statement about the place the earlier revivals had in America "that helped sow the seeds of the American Revolution." ...

The thirteen colonies concluded that the time had come and they disobeyed. We must understand that for Rutherford and Locke, and for the Founding Fathers, *the bottom line* was not an abstract point of conversation over a tea table; at a certain point it had [130] to be acted upon. The thirteen colonies reached the bottom line: they acted in civil disobedience. That civil disobedience led to open war in which men and women died. And that led to the founding of the United States of America. ... And to [the Founding Fathers] the basic *bottom line* was not pragmatic; it was one of principle.

Please read most thoughtfully what I am going to say in the next sentence: If there is no final place for civil disobedience, then government has been made autonomous, and as such, it has been put in the place of the Living God. If there is no final place for civil disobedience, then the government has been put in the place of the Living God, because then you are to obey it even when it tells you in its own way at that time to worship Caesar. And that point is exactly where the early Christians performed their acts of civil disobedience even when it cost them their lives.

## Conclusion

We face an even more secular world than that confronted by Schaeffer. Contemporary issues of moral concern are more intense than the humanist culture of his day. The older humanist secularism has morphed into what James Kurth in his essay in this issue denominates “global progressivism.” What do civil disobedience and the legitimate use of “force” mean in our milieu?

Given the ascendancy of cultural Marxist hostility seeking to demolish historic Christianity, Schaeffer’s appeal to Rutherford and Bob Dylan serve as a fitting conclusion to this refresher on his *Manifesto*. Rutherford and Dylan would have understood each other. In “When You Gonna Wake Up,” from the album *Slow Train Coming*, Dylan has these lines:

Adulterers in churches and pornography in the schools  
You got gangsters in power and lawbreakers making rules.  
When you gonna wake up,  
When you gonna wake up,  
When you gonna wake up  
And strengthen the things that remain?

The difference in the centuries, and the difference in the language used, changes nothing.

Schaeffer’s concern for the church, although dated, is relevant for the church today. We still await his authentic revolution, reformation, and revival. Yes, Schaeffer is gone. But the revolutionary message of his *Manifesto* should not be forgotten.