

Pastor Stef's Book Review – August 2016

During my formative years of coming to an intellectual understanding of my faith, Francis Schaeffer's role was huge. Ironically, the intellectual seeds he sowed in me sent me on a journey that caused me to reject many of Schaeffer's conclusions about history and his stance on different philosophers and theologians. Over the years I have found a number of people with the same testimony. This is also the conclusion Barry Hankins comes to in his book ***Francis Schaeffer and the Shaping of Evangelical America (2008)***. Hankins is a sympathetic biographer who shows Schaeffer's flaws and his sincere love for Christ and people.

Schaeffer was a pioneer in evangelical circles in encouraging people to display the Lordship of Christ over everything by engaging with culture rather than hiding from it. He was one of the first in the movement to see environmental issues as part of our biblical mandate – back in the 1970s. He was one of the first to encourage evangelicals to appreciate and engage with the arts and with ideas being presented in movies and plays and novels and popular music and history and philosophy. Because of this he inspired many evangelicals to become scholars and experts in many of these areas, which then, almost across the board, caused them to recognize Schaeffer's inadequate knowledge of these areas. (Ironically, Schaeffer almost never read a book or deeply studied, and he was quite defensive in receiving critiques, even from fellow evangelical scholars, about his work). In this way, Hankins' book is insightful in showing how Schaeffer both influenced and was influenced by American evangelicalism, including its anti-intellectual tendencies and often overly politicized faith - where evangelistic and pragmatic agendas tend to fudge the facts. (This is true of Canadian evangelicalism as well, though we tend to be moderated by the influence of British evangelicalism, as can be seen in schools like *Regent College* here in Vancouver).

Hankins' book teaches us the danger of idolizing and/or making our faith dependent upon any one person. On the other hand, we don't have to throw them "under the bus."

I had a recent conversation with an individual who mentioned Chuck Swindoll's influence on him about 20 years ago. But now, he finds Swindoll's books and sermons simplistic and so, he has moved on to other mentors. And all of this is OK. Any good teacher hopes their students will move beyond them and realizes that this may also mean that they come to disagree with them in some areas. Unless we're dealing with some of the real "greats" like Augustine or Calvin (whom you will also find yourself disagreeing with from time to time), there is something unhealthy in never moving or expanding yourself beyond a Schaeffer or a Swindoll after 20 or 30 years.

I'm grateful for Francis Schaeffer's influence on my life and his 22 books that I devoured over a two year binge. Though some of those books now make me cringe, others, like *The Marks of a Christian*, continue to drive almost my entire approach to life and ministry.

Francis Schaeffer will continue to be my deeply flawed hero whose picture hangs on the wall of my office. Thank you, Schaeffer, for what you have done for me. I can't wait until God sets up his new creation, and I get to see you and thank you in person, face to face!