



The abolition of truth

Schaeffer's prediction of tyranny in America is coming true

When truth retreats, tyranny advances. And in American life today, truth is retreating, and tyranny is advancing. Have you heard that before? I can remember Francis Schaeffer in his last days, his dying days, when he was fighting lymphoma with massive doses of chemotherapy. With his last gasps of breath he would say, *"The crisis is one of truth, and if we lose we will have tyranny in America before the end of this century."*

Schaeffer was a radical. In his book *The Christian at the End of the Twentieth Century*, he predicted a dictatorship of 51 percent, ruled by the elite or ruled by a dictator. After all, in the early 1980s who would have said that we were headed toward tyranny in America? Oh no! Reagan was in the White House. The Moral Majority was in its ascendancy. Everybody was "born again." Who would listen to someone who said that tyranny is coming? But Schaeffer looked not at what we saw on the surface, but at the deeper philosophical undercurrents that shape ideas. Ideas have consequences, and he could see where those ideas were going to lead us.

What do we mean by truth? Schaeffer used to preach about "true truth." It is true that this lectern is made of wood, but that is not true truth. True truth means that there is an ultimate reality, an absolute. There is a physical order to the universe; therefore, there is also a moral order to the universe.

But today truth is retreating. Today we are witnessing the abolition of truth. Since the 1960s in America, the reigning orthodoxy has been *relativism* — the belief that there is no absolute truth. This is absolutely rampant on our campuses in America today. One of the leading proponents of relativism — or deconstructionism, which is what it is called on our campuses — claims there is no objective meaning to what is written; what happened in the past has no significance; it only matters what we think about it today.

Think of the implications of that for the Bible. Think of the implications of that for the American Constitution. Stanley Fish of Duke University, the leading scholar of the deconstructionist school of thought, said, *"Since all principles are preferences, they are nothing but masks for the will to power."* He also said, *"Someone is always going to be restricted next, and it is your job to make sure that someone is not you."* Think of those words, because when the control of moral discourse is in the hands of people who believe that it is nothing but power, they then control the machinery and the society in which we live.

We are awash in relativism. And tyranny inevitably results because it is drawn into the vacuum of moral chaos. If authority cannot be sustained among people by their shared assumptions, by their agreement about the meaning of the life, then it will be imposed on people from the top.

Schaeffer's prediction is coming true before our very eyes — not at the end of the 20th century, but before.

Ominous signs of the coming tyranny are on the horizon at the moment. They are coming from many different directions, but I want to focus on simply two. One is from the intellectual elites in America, who gave us the politically correct movement, which started on the campus but is now invading the mainstream of American life. And the other is coming up from the bottom, from the streets of the inner cities. In the 18 years of Prison Fellowship's ministry, I have seen what is happening to a generation that we have lost: the generation of barbarians.

First, the politically correct movement. George Mason University in Virginia has issued regulations that say you can be kicked out for discrimination if you jump when a homosexual touches you on the arm. Or you can be thrown out for discrimination for keeping a physical distance from known gays or lesbians.

A woman in Wisconsin recently advertised in the newspaper for a "mature Christian handyman" to work on renovating her 100-year-old home. The officials bore down on her immediately for that kind of "discrimination." They took her to court and she ended up being fined \$8,000! That is repression.

Consider hate crime laws. The Congress of the United States is now trying to put through a \$22 billion omnibus crime bill that enormously expands hate crimes at the federal level. Hate crimes simply say that you are punished once for the crime you commit and the second time for the thought you had when you committed that crime. A black lad in Wisconsin named Todd said to his friends, "There goes a white boy. Go get him!" They beat him up, and Todd got two years for assault. And because Todd said, "There goes a white boy," he got another two years for having racist attitudes. Now you carry that one step further, and what you have is the state criminalizing the thoughts you have in your mind and putting you in prison for those thoughts. And that is repression.

The most serious piece of legislation pending now in Congress is the Freedom of Access to Clinics Act. The only kind of political protest that is about to become a criminal action is a protest in front of an abortion clinic. The House passed it, and the Senate passed it. And I believe that we are two or three months away from the passage of legislation that will make it illegal — with three year prison sentences — for you to protest in front of an abortion clinic and even to kneel and pray in front of that clinic if, in fact, you are denying access to the person coming in.

The second danger comes from the field that I know best — crime. You only have to look at today's headlines. We have had a serious crime problem in America. We incarcerate a higher percentage of our population than any other nation on the face of this earth. We have had a 560 percent increase in violent crimes since the 1960s.

But what is happening right now is different. Historically, there was a motive for crime. Today there is none. A 10-year-old kid in the District of Columbia swung a two-year-old around until he bashed the two-year-old's head in and killed him. And they came to that 10-year-old, and they said, "Why did you do that?" And the young boy said, "I was just having sport." Killing for fun, for no reason.

What we are witnessing in America, make no mistake about it, is a breakdown of conscience. The conscience is something that is ingrained. We know that from what Paul says in Romans 2, "*The law is written on their hearts.*" Conscience is born into us. But we've got a generation of kids out there who have never been taught right and wrong, who have never been civilized in the home, who have never heard values in the school, and are part of a popular culture that tells them there is no right and wrong. And they are rushing out into the streets, randomly shooting and killing, and the American people are stricken with fear.

I remember going to Bogota, Colombia, a few years ago and being absolutely shocked because I was met at the airport by troops in helmets and camouflage suits. Troops everywhere! And this is a picture of what is coming in America because of the breakdown of conscience and the public fear that follows. Florida and Texas are now legislating curfews. Young people have to be in at 11:00 at night. That sounds good when you are living in a neighborhood where you are worried about those young people creating crime. But a curfew is martial law. A curfew is a surrender of our constitutional freedoms.

In a poll in Dade County, Florida, people were asked, "Would you be willing to accept random search and seizures and random searches of your homes and your automobiles to fight crime?" Forget about the Fourth Amendment constitutional protection against unreasonable search and seizure! Seventy-one percent of the people in Dade County said "Yes."

We are witnessing public attitudes exactly like those in Nazi Germany in the beginning of the 1930s. Give me anything to protect me!

Given a choice between liberty and order, people choose order. They welcome it. What you are left with is friendly fascism.

What do we do? How do we rescue the culture? Well, I am going to shock you! We don't. Our job is not to rescue the culture. Our job is to proclaim the gospel of Jesus Christ and to make disciples: to be the church; to be faithful to God's holy Word. But at the same time, we have to do this with a Christian mind, aware of the snares. We have to have a Biblically informed worldview.

We have to be prepared to make a defense of what we believe, and to have a Biblically informed mind and a Biblical worldview in all that we do. Our minds have to be soaked in the truth of God, the Scripture, and we have to look at everything happening around us through God's eyes. We have to begin to think Christianly about every single aspect of life, so that every single one of us is an apologist.

But I think there is a grand opportunity for Christians to make our views heard and understood. Yes, they may laugh at us — while their children are pointing loaded guns at innocent people and maybe at you.

Talk about abstinence, and yes, they will laugh at you. They will laugh at you while their kids are getting pregnant, while 50 percent of the kids are being born to unwed mothers today, and while the welfare bill is \$35 billion. They just may begin to listen. Talk about conscience. Let them go ahead and laugh, while they put bars on their houses at night—when they're not sure their kids can get home from school, when schools look more like prisons than prisons do.

How do we engage the world responsibly? That may be the hardest question of all. As the church, as the people of God, how do we responsibly engage the world?

I want to choose my words very, very carefully, because I sense that there is a growing division within evangelical ranks over how we approach the political process. I sense there is a growing debate bubbling just below the surface on what we Christians should be doing in the Congress and with respect to the president of the United States.

Let me first give a word of caution. We are to treat all leaders with the utmost respect. We ought to deal with them with civility and with love because the Bible tells us to pursue peace with all men. There is never an excuse for disrespect for the office or for lack of love of the person. But this raises a tough question. How do you engage in a political debate with people in political office that you don't agree with?

- *First*, always zealously guard the independence of the gospel of Jesus Christ. I warned my colleagues in the 1980s about being too close to any political movement — even if we like the people in office and we like their policies — because
 1. the gospel and ideology do not mix;
 2. you can never make the gospel hostage to the fortunes of any political party; and
 3. political leaders will use us. I know. I used to do it. I know better than anybody.

I have said that to evangelicals of the conservative stripe. I feel I also have to say it to evangelical leaders of the more liberal persuasion. Don't be taken in with threats or intimidation just because now the political complexion has changed. Politicians on both the right and the left will use you.

- *Second*, I want you to remember that there is a crucial distinction between the magistrate and the office of the magistrate. There is a crucial distinction between God appointing the office of magistrate for our own good to preserve order and to protect us, and God, at the same time, appointing a person to fulfill the office of that magistrate. God intends that the person be faithful to God's commands because God put him in that position to do exactly that. If that person acts contrary to God's will, the church has not only the right, but also the duty to challenge him and to call him to Biblical fidelity.

So, be civil, be loving, but never be intimidated in God's call for righteousness and faithfulness. Being civil does not mean being silent. Speak the truth. Never be afraid to call our leaders of either party at every level to fidelity to God's righteousness. Do it with civility, but if you have that opportunity and are silent, you betray your heritage, and you fall short of your duty to the living God.

Always remember, also, that great changes do not take place in cultures and in societies overnight. Be patient. Press on. Don't be in despair. And the way this culture is going to change is when the people out in the field, in the pews, are disciplined in Christ; when they go out and patiently, earnestly work, one person at a time, to bring about change.

- *Finally*, remember our weapons. Remember what the apostle Paul says in Romans 12: "Overcome evil with good." It is the gospel. It is the incarnation. God overcame the evil of the world with the good of His Son nailed to a cross in an ugly death between two criminals. The atonement was overcoming — the sacrificial Lamb of God was overcoming evil with good.

No matter how dark or ominous are the signs of tyranny on the horizon, that is our hope: that by clinging to the truth and the promises of God, and by being the people of God — faithful and diligent in pursuing what He has called us to — even now, even yet, we will overcome evil with good by the grace of God unto His glory.

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