

francis schaeffer how should we then live

Francis Schaeffer: How Should We Then Live is a profound exploration into the intersection of faith, philosophy, art, and culture, offering a critical examination of Western civilization from the perspective of a Christian worldview. Schaeffer, a theologian, philosopher, and Presbyterian pastor, draws from his extensive knowledge of history, art, and theology to argue that the decline of Western culture is deeply entwined with its departure from a biblical foundation. This article will delve into the core themes of Schaeffer's work, his critiques of modern society, and the implications for contemporary Christians.

Introduction to Francis Schaeffer

Francis Schaeffer (1912-1984) was a pivotal figure in the evangelical movement of the 20th century. He established the L'Abri community in Switzerland, where he engaged with students and thinkers from around the world, fostering discussions that blended faith and intellectual inquiry. His writings, including "The God Who Is There," "Escape from Reason," and "How Should We Then Live," have left a lasting impact on Christian thought.

Schaeffer's approach emphasizes the importance of a comprehensive worldview that integrates faith with all aspects of life. He believed that Christianity is not merely a set of beliefs but a way of understanding reality that should influence culture, art, politics, and personal conduct.

Overview of "How Should We Then Live?"

In "How Should We Then Live?" Schaeffer presents a historical and philosophical narrative that traces the development of Western thought and its gradual departure from Christian principles. The work is both a critique of modern secularism and a call to Christians to engage with culture thoughtfully and actively.

Main Themes of the Book

1. The Decline of Absolute Truth: Schaeffer argues that the abandonment of objective truth, particularly in the realms of philosophy and ethics, has led to moral relativism. This shift, he contends, has eroded the foundations of Western civilization.

2. **The Role of Art and Culture:** Schaeffer emphasizes the significance of art as a reflection of a society's values. He examines various artistic movements and their theological implications, arguing that art can either point to God or reflect a godless worldview.

3. **Philosophical Foundations:** The book discusses pivotal thinkers such as Descartes, Kant, and Nietzsche, illustrating how their ideas contributed to the fragmentation of Western thought. Schaeffer critiques the Enlightenment's emphasis on reason over revelation, which he believes has led to existential despair and the loss of meaning.

4. **Historical Perspective:** Schaeffer provides a historical overview of Western civilization, highlighting key events, movements, and figures that shaped its trajectory. He emphasizes the influence of Christianity in establishing the moral and ethical framework of society.

5. **Call to Action:** Ultimately, Schaeffer urges Christians to reclaim their cultural heritage and engage with contemporary issues from a biblical perspective. He challenges believers to think critically and act decisively in a world increasingly hostile to Christian values.

The Historical Journey of Western Thought

Schaeffer meticulously traces the evolution of Western thought, beginning with the early Church and its foundational beliefs. He highlights several key periods and movements:

1. The Early Church

- The early Christians established a worldview grounded in the teachings of Jesus and the Apostles.
- The integration of faith with all aspects of life was paramount, leading to a flourishing of culture and thought.

2. The Renaissance and Reformation

- The Renaissance marked a revival of classical learning and humanism, but it also set the stage for the Reformation.
- The Reformation emphasized Scripture as the ultimate authority, challenging the established Church and promoting individual interpretation of faith.

3. The Enlightenment

- The Enlightenment's emphasis on reason and empirical evidence shifted the focus away from divine revelation.
- Key figures like Descartes and Kant introduced ideas that would fracture the relationship between faith and reason.

4. Modernism and Postmodernism

- Modernism sought to build a rational foundation for knowledge, often dismissing spiritual and metaphysical considerations.
- Postmodernism, emerging in reaction to modernism, rejected absolute truths altogether, leading to moral relativism.

The Impact of Art and Culture

Schaeffer's analysis of art is particularly compelling. He argues that art is not merely a form of expression but a manifestation of the underlying worldview of a culture. He categorizes art into two broad themes:

1. Art Reflecting a Christian Worldview

- Art that is inspired by biblical truths often conveys hope, beauty, and a sense of order.
- Examples include the works of Renaissance artists like Michelangelo and Raphael, who infused their art with spiritual significance.

2. Art Reflecting a Secular Worldview

- In contrast, modern art often reflects despair, chaos, and a sense of meaninglessness.
- Schaeffer critiques contemporary art movements that embrace nihilism and challenge traditional values.

Philosophical Foundations and Their Consequences

Schaeffer's exploration of key philosophers reveals how their ideas have had a profound impact on society. He highlights several notable figures:

- René Descartes: Emphasized doubt and reason as the starting point for knowledge, leading to skepticism about divine truth.

- Immanuel Kant: Proposed that moral truths are not derived from God but from human reason, undermining the authority of Scripture.
- Friedrich Nietzsche: Declared the "death of God," positing that humanity must create its own values, a concept that fueled existentialist thought.

These philosophical shifts culminated in a culture increasingly detached from absolute truth, resulting in moral ambiguity and the questioning of traditional norms.

The Christian Response: Engaging Culture

Schaeffer's work is not merely diagnostic; it is fundamentally prescriptive. He challenges Christians to:

1. **Understand the Cultural Landscape:** Christians must be aware of the philosophical and cultural trends that shape society. This understanding enables them to engage thoughtfully with contemporary issues.
2. **Articulate a Biblical Worldview:** Believers should articulate a coherent Christian worldview that addresses moral and ethical dilemmas. This involves grounding discussions in Scripture and demonstrating the relevance of faith in all areas of life.
3. **Create and Support Meaningful Art:** Schaeffer encourages Christians to produce art that reflects God's truth and beauty, contributing positively to the cultural narrative.
4. **Participate in Public Discourse:** Christians should engage in public debates and discussions, advocating for policies and ideologies that align with biblical values.

Conclusion: A Call to Action

"How Should We Then Live?" serves as an essential guide for Christians navigating the complexities of modern society. Schaeffer's insights challenge believers to recognize the historical and philosophical roots of contemporary issues while empowering them to respond with conviction and creativity.

In an age marked by confusion and moral relativism, Schaeffer's call to reclaim a biblical worldview remains ever relevant. By understanding the past and engaging meaningfully with the present, Christians can effectively contribute to a more just, beautiful, and truthful society. The ultimate question to ponder, as Schaeffer poignantly asks, is how we, as individuals and as a community of faith, will choose to live in light of these truths.

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the central theme of Francis Schaeffer's 'How Should We Then Live'?

The central theme revolves around the moral and philosophical decline of Western civilization and the need for a return to a biblical worldview to address societal issues.

How does Schaeffer view the relationship between art and culture in 'How Should We Then Live'?

Schaeffer emphasizes that art reflects the underlying beliefs and values of a culture, arguing that true artistic expression should stem from a biblical understanding of reality.

What historical events does Schaeffer discuss to illustrate his points in the book?

Schaeffer discusses key historical events such as the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment, highlighting how these periods influenced modern thought and moral decay.

In 'How Should We Then Live', what solution does Schaeffer propose for the problems facing society?

Schaeffer proposes that individuals and society should return to a foundational understanding of God and biblical principles to guide ethical decision-making and cultural renewal.

What role does Schaeffer assign to the individual in shaping culture according to his book?

Schaeffer asserts that individuals must take personal responsibility to engage with and transform culture by living out their faith and influencing others through their actions and beliefs.

How has 'How Should We Then Live' influenced contemporary Christian thought?

The book has significantly impacted contemporary Christian thought by encouraging believers to critically engage with culture and uphold biblical values in various spheres of life.

What media was used to complement the messages in 'How Should We Then Live'?

The book was accompanied by a television series that visually illustrated Schaeffer's ideas, making complex philosophical concepts more accessible to a broader audience.

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