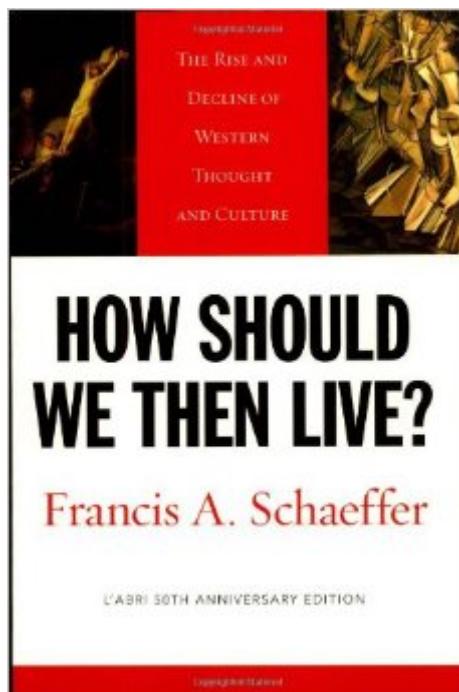


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How Should We Then Live? (L'Abri 50th Anniversary Edition): The Rise And Decline Of Western Thought And Culture



Synopsis

As one of the foremost evangelical thinkers of the twentieth century, Francis Schaeffer long pondered the fate of declining Western culture. In this brilliant book he analyzed the reasons for modern society's state of affairs and presented the only viable alternative: living by the Christian ethic, acceptance of God's revelation, and total affirmation of the Bible's morals, values, and meaning.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In "How Should We Then Live," Francis Schaeffer seeks to give an analysis of the events of history and how they have shaped our present cultural philosophies, thoughts, ideas, and beliefs. Schaeffer begins with the culture of Ancient Rome and leads us all the way through to (written in 1976) the present. How has our current way of thinking developed? Through philosophy? The arts? Science? Religion? The answer is through all of them, and Schaeffer shows how a Christian worldview (or a lack of one) did and continues to affect people and nations. According to Schaeffer, modern man really only cares about two things: personal peace and prosperity...at any cost. How we have arrived here is a very interesting story...Schaeffer himself admits in the introduction that a comprehensive study of the rise and fall of Western thought and culture would be a near impossibility. He's right. But many times in the book I think he fell short. Schaeffer tends to explain concepts during certain periods in history very clearly, then assumes that the reader is familiar with other periods without the same foundation being laid. Again, as he said, the problem is he can't treat the subject comprehensively in only 258 pages (many of which are photographs). I also felt that

Schaeffer was somewhat uncomfortable in knowing how to fit musical influences into the book. His musical statements don't seem to support some of his ideas very well at times. (However, he handles the influence of art quite well.) Also, as with any book examining culture that is 25 years old, much of the material is outdated. It's a shame that Schaeffer didn't live to see and comment on some of the events of the past decade.

In reading *How Should We Then Live*, I found that Francis Schaeffer reminded me a great deal of another famous Christian writer, John Foxe. Like Foxe, Schaeffer's writing--specifically, his accuracy in assessing and describing art and culture--improve the closer he comes to his own era. I had never read anything by Schaeffer before but had always heard him highly spoken of, so when I came across this book recently I bought it on impulse. It was a fascinating, brisk read that I completed in two days. What Schaeffer sets out to do is follow the development of the Western philosophy of life from the decadence of Rome to the decadence of the modern world and explain what has gone wrong with our society. He also seeks to describe how a proper worldview balances the universal with the particulars and how most modern philosophies overstress one or the other to a fault. Schaeffer's flaws are not many, but they are often great. He begins the book with a brief explanation of presuppositions--unfortunately, many of his own presuppositions give an otherwise welcome brief history a bad flavor. Starting with his presupposition--pointed out *ad infinitum* by other reviewers--that all pre-Reformation Christianity is unquestionably bad, he grossly misinterprets the works of St. Thomas Aquinas, Dante, and Michelangelo, to name only a few. His view of Greco-Roman culture is also oversimplified. Ironically, for someone so keen on balancing the universals and the particulars, he is often only generally accurate in the broad strokes and does poorly on the particulars. I've dwelt on the flaws, but this is still a good book. Just read it knowing that much of the early material is either oversimplified or misinterpreted.

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