



THE RISE AND
DECLINE OF
WESTERN
THOUGHT
AND CULTURE



HOW SHOULD WE THEN LIVE?

Francis A. Schaeffer

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Publisher's Foreword

by Lane T. Dennis

Few Christians have had greater impact during the last half of the twentieth century than Dr. Francis A. Schaeffer. A man with a remarkable breadth of cultural interest and with penetrating insight into post-Christian, postmodern life, Schaeffer was also a man who cared deeply about people and their search for truth, meaning, and beauty in life. If there is one central theme throughout Schaeffer's twenty-four published books (all of which are still in print), it is that "true truth" exists as revealed in the Bible by "the God who is there," and that what we do with this truth has decisive consequences in every area of life and culture.

This book, *How Should We Then Live?* was Schaeffer's nineteenth book and clearly among his most important. It grows out of Schaeffer's life-long study of Western thought and culture in light of biblical truth and the Christian worldview. It was written at a time—in the mid-1970s—when Christian and non-Christian leaders were trying to understand the cultural upheaval of the 1960s generation and to assess the implications of this for the future of the church and Western culture. Schaeffer's thesis was that if we are to understand (as stated in the title) "how we should live" today, then we must understand the cultural and intellectual forces that brought us to this day. Schaeffer thus begins his penetrating analysis with the fall of Rome, followed by the Middle Ages, the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the Enlightenment, while focusing in the twentieth century primarily on the influence of art, music, literature, and film.

Though written nearly three decades ago, Schaeffer's basic analysis of Western culture has deeply influenced a generation of Christian leaders and is as relevant today as it was thirty years ago. Many of Schaeffer's insights carry the prophetic ring of truth concerning the moral, spiritual, and intellectual upheaval of our day. Thus Schaeffer noted the devastating impact of the post-Christian consensus on "art, music, drama, theology and the

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mass media,” lamenting the tragic result that “values died.” Consequently, Schaeffer noted, people are left with no basis for meaning or truth, or hope in life, and instead have adopted the two impoverished values of “personal peace and affluence . . . regardless of what the result will be in the lifetimes of [our] children and grandchildren.”

Similarly, Schaeffer foresaw the postmodern breakdown of any basis for moral absolutes. One result is what Schaeffer called “arbitrary absolutes” imposed on the culture by a professional elite (e.g., abortion “rights” supported by the legal and medical professions). Another result is abolition of any basis for sexual ethics, with implications that are now being played out in the legal battle over “gay marriage.” Again, though written nearly three decades ago, the timeliness and significance of Schaeffer’s insights are remarkable—as is evident, for example, in Schaeffer’s critique of Alfred Kinsey in light of the recent Hollywood adulation of Kinsey as the liberator of sexual freedom, in the Academy Award-nominated movie *Kinsey*.

What place does *How Should We Then Live?* have among Schaeffer’s published works? For the person who has never read Schaeffer, this book provides an overview of his best insights into biblical truth and its relationship to all of culture—and as such *How Should We Then Live?* provides an ideal introduction to Schaeffer’s thought and work. Beyond this, however, a number of Schaeffer’s other books continue to make a significant contribution. Especially noteworthy are: *The Francis Schaeffer Trilogy* (Crossway Books), which includes Schaeffer’s three foundational books *The God Who Is There*, *Escape from Reason*, and *He Is There and He Is Not Silent*. Likewise, *True Spirituality* (available from Tyndale House) provides in-depth insight into what it means to live out the Christian life in truth and reality. In addition to these volumes, twenty-two of Schaeffer’s books are available in a five-volume set of *The Complete Works of Francis A. Schaeffer* (Crossway Books).

Lastly, we should mention that this new edition of *How Should We Then Live?* is published on the occasion of the fiftieth anniversary of the founding of L’Abri Fellowship—the worldwide work founded by Francis and Edith Schaeffer in Huémoz, Switzerland, in 1955. The remarkable story of L’Abri in its early years is told in the classic book *L’Abri* (Crossway Books) written by Edith Schaeffer. Today L’Abri has ten branches located around the world in Switzerland, England, the Netherlands, Sweden, Australia, Germany, Korea, and Canada, including two branches in the

United States. For more information about L'Abri we would encourage you to visit the L'Abri website at www.labri.org. The new cover on this fiftieth anniversary edition is also noteworthy in its design and the selection of the two paintings it features, both of which were central to Schaeffer's message. Thus the rise of Western thought and culture is depicted on the upper left corner of the cover with Rembrandt's painting of the "Raising of the Cross," and the decline is depicted by Marcel Duchamp's painting of "Nude Descending a Staircase," epitomizing the fragmentation of modern life and culture.

Schaeffer's question to each of us—"How should we then live?"—is especially urgent in our own day as we see the growing disintegration and decline of truth and morality throughout our world. What then is the answer that Schaeffer offers in response? It is a commitment to God's Word as truth. It is a compassion for a culture that is lost and dying without the gospel. It is a commitment to the costly practice of truth in the midst of the intellectual, moral, and philosophical battles of our day. It is living in the power and reality of the God who is there, bearing the witness of His truth across the full spectrum of life and culture. As stated by Schaeffer in his closing words: "This book is written in the hope that this generation may turn from . . . the paths of death and may live." Few have articulated this message more clearly and demonstrated this message more consistently than Francis Schaeffer. And because of this, few will come to the end of this book without a new vision for how, indeed, we should live.

Lane T. Dennis, Ph.D.
President and Publisher
Crossway Books
February 2005

Author's Note

In no way does this book make a pretense of being a complete chronological history of Western culture. It is questionable if such a book could even be written. This book is, however, an analysis of the key moments in history which have formed out present culture, and the thinking of the people who brought those moments to pass. This study is made in the hope that light may be shed upon the major characteristics of our age and that solutions may be found to the myriad of problems which face us as we look toward the end of the twentieth century.

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