

Book Review

Francis Schaeffer Trilogy **(Good News Publishing)**

There is no question that in the last few decades NZ has gone through major moral and social changes. Some of our assumed Christian heritage no longer exists and the foundations of our society have shifted.

As Christians, this creates some very fundamental questions:

- What impact does this have on how we preach the Word and engage in church ministry?
- How do we train our children to be effective servants of Christ in this morally depraved society?
- What are effective ways to reach the lost?
- How do we minister to those who get a tertiary education and potentially are highly influenced by humanistic philosophy?

This book will help you with these key questions.

The Francis Schaeffer Trilogy is a combination of Schaeffer's three key books:

- The God who is there
- Escape from reason
- He is there and He is not silent.

Francis Schaeffer had a highly regarded ministry in Switzerland where he taught people from all walks of life the relevance of the Scriptures to modern man and also how people can effectively reach people for Christ. He was known as the little man with a big vision and his influence spread far beyond the borders of Switzerland – especially through his books and films.

Schaeffer starts this work off by explaining that the thinking of mankind went on a significant change about the turn of the twentieth century – first in Europe, then in the USA. Prior to the twentieth century the dominant thinking was that absolute truth existed but it could be found apart from the Scriptures. In fact, the humanists of the time mocked the bible as being inconsistent with absolute truth. However the problem was that this optimistic humanism had no foundations to build on and ultimately collapsed like the Lord talking about the house built on sand.

How did mankind solve this problem? Did they go back to the Scripture as the true foundation for truth? Unfortunately no. Instead a new worldview developed – we call it postmodernism – the idea that there is no absolute truth. Schaeffer calls it “going beyond the line of despair” because this modern view is irrational and cannot build a solid foundation for anything. To give an obvious example – if I said there was no absolute truth, obviously that statement is self-refuting because I have made a truth statement.

Schaffer explains how this modern thinking has affected many key aspects of life including:

- Art
- Music
- Language and literature
- Philosophy
- Theology

One of the reasons why many churches today have interfaith services is because they have succumbed to this modern thinking. If truth is not absolute then all religions are equally valid.

It also helps to explain why we have a drug problem in our schools and in society in general. If there are no objective standards, and if life is meaningless, why not get a 'high' – there is nothing else to live for.

The rest of this book (3 books combined) develops this theme. Book 2 demonstrates how modern man has become irrational because of this post modernistic thinking. Book three ties all the themes together by showing from the scriptures that modern man need not be in despair because God is not silent – God indeed does exist and has revealed Himself. He has spoken through the pages of Holy Scripture and therefore there is hope – both spiritually and philosophically – for modern man.

There are a number of things I appreciate about this book:

1. Schaffer gives a very clear description of the gospel. He points out that the gospel is the way that man is reconciled with God and that he comes to God not on his own righteousness, but on the righteousness of Christ.
2. Some very helpful guidelines are given on how to reach people in our post-modern society. Schaeffer suggests we “find the point of tension”. For example, if you are witnessing to a person concerned with social justice, you would challenge them as to the foundations for social justices on a humanistic foundation. Schaffer calls this the “point of tension” because this person obviously believes in ultimate standards (in this case social justice) and yet is unable to find a foundation for this apart from biblical foundations. This is a helpful tool to challenge and reach people.
3. It is quite clear through the book that Schaffer has a great love for people because they are made in the image of God. This sets us a high standard as we witness.
4. Another of Schaffer’s concerns is reaching the children of Christians. One big issue he faced in his ministry in Switzerland was the number of young people who came to him for help, who were raised in Christian homes, yet were not taught the relevance of the Christian faith in our post-modern world. Parents with children will find this book very relevant because this issue is very much on Schaffer’s heart and he says many pertinent things in this book about how parents can teach their children the relevance of the Christian faith in these modern times.
5. One of Schaffer’s unique gifts was effective communication. Some of the concepts in this book grapple with serious issues in philosophy. Yet Schaffer

explains his terms well and also uses helpful diagrams to help the reader understand the key concepts. Also there is a glossary included in the book.

I highly recommend this book. It is a helpful tool for witnessing to non-Christians, help Christian young people think through the issues of their faith and also for University Students.

As you use this in your various spheres of ministry, I pray you will help people to see – in Schaffer's timely words – that God indeed is there. There is an answer to the irrational thinking of modern man because God is there – He has revealed Himself and thus He is not silent.