

## BOOK REVIEW OF FRANCIS SCHAEFFER'S THE GOD WHO IS THERE, by George Paz, 3 pgs

### Introduction

*The present chasm between generations has been brought about almost entirely by a change in the concept of truth.* A secular reform is happening in our day and many Christians appear to be sideswiped by the velocity of change that is occurring. In *The God Who is There*, Francis Schaeffer *unravels the postmodern plague of our day* with wisdom, clarity, and a genuine love for unbelievers. Schaeffer argues that a change in the "concept of truth" has crept into the world with Christians unaware. His message to Christians: repent from your ignorance and begin reaching modern man with the Gospel by showing them the logic of their own fatal conclusions.

### Summary

In *section one*, Schaeffer argues that society once viewed the world through *the lens of antithesis*. (That is, if something is true then its opposite must be not true.) Yet, through the influence of modern philosophy, *man lost an understanding of absolutes*. Thus, by this flaw in reason, man can no longer classify truth from non-truth. Once man has lost the absolute of a God "who is there," the conclusions of their worldview slip below the realm of romanticism and into a realm of despair. He classifies the dividing line between these two realms the "line of despair." Next, the author steps back into history and shows specific examples of how modern philosophy started this loss of absolute meaning and, consequently, began to trickle down into other aspects of society like art, music, and the general culture.

In *section two*, the author shifts scenes and turns to modern theology and argues that that too has lost absolutes. The author begins by stating that German theologians began to play with the concept of antitheses and ended up denying *everything miraculous and supernatural*. Despite their theological denials, they continued to search for a historical Jesus as they sought to separate Christ's divinity from mere historical facts. Needless to say, they failed. At this point, the author claims, they had two options. They could have returned to their presuppositions and admitted that a historical Christ cannot be separated from his divinity, or abandoned religion and embraced nihilism. Instead, the author says, they abandoned both options and took after modern philosophy by rejecting absolutes or antithesis. From here, the author argues, *liberal theology ultimately became mysticism*. While theology was once founded on absolute premises, it had now been *reduced to illusions*. Though modern theology likewise uses terms such as "god," "Christ," and "love," the meaning behind these terms are mystical illusions in that their definitions are used as abstract concepts with no absolute meaning. Finally, the author ends this section by predicting the future outcome of "new theology". The author argues that modern theology naturally led to the conclusion of faith being irrational in every sense. Thus *modern theology gave birth to two forms of "new theology"* in an effort to bridge the gap between faith and rationality: Christian atheism and a secular notion of pantheism.

In *section three*, Francis Schaeffer digs deeper into the new theology and highlights the immense differences between it and biblical Christianity. He begins by arguing that *biblical Christianity grounds man's personality to the personality of God*. New theology on the other hand, has no basis for a God who is there--they can only reduce the origin of personality to impersonal matter. Second, Schaeffer argues that *biblical Christianity has a non-contradictory basis for knowledge because God created*

man with the capacity to learn, He has spoken to His creation, and He has exemplified love through His relationship within the Trinity. New theology on the other hand, has no basis by which to answer any of these because of their lack of absolutes. Third, the author looks to the problem of evil and suffering. While new theology brushes this problem off and claims that "man has always been fallen man," it fails to provide an answer and instead gives no adequate basis by which to solve this problem. In contrast, biblical Christianity not only provides an answer, but a solution as well. Mankind experiences evil and suffering because of their moral rebellion against a personal God. Despite this cosmic transgression, God did not abandon mankind; instead, he sent his Son as a substitutionary sacrifice for those would repent of their sins and trust in Him. Through the Gospel, God is reversing the effects of the fall.

In section four, Schaeffer moves forward and begins to address Christians on how to evangelize to modern man. He argues that unless Christians lovingly confront modern men with the inconsistent conclusions of their presuppositions, efforts to share the Gospel may be inadequate; either modern man will not see their need for the Gospel or our words will become nothing more than "evangelical cliché" to them. Next, after Christians find the "tension point" and expose modern man's inconsistencies, they will either see their need for the Gospel or harden their hearts even more.

In section five, Schaeffer reinforces the need for modern man to see the lack of consistencies of their conclusions. He begins by stating that apologetics must not be limited to heartless scholarly work with no substance in the real world. Instead, apologetics must be the aim of every Christian. The Gospel, the author says, must be communicated in such a way that modern man can understand. He then ends this section by speaking of the nature of reality. Truth, he says, does not ultimately rest on "orthodoxy," "creeds," or even the Scriptures. Rather, he explains, they are important because God is there that is the only reason they have their importance. Without God, we have nothing.

Finally, in section six, Schaeffer ends his book by urging other Christians to live consistently with the Christian faith. Though a Christian comes to faith alone, the author says, he is not called to live the Christian life alone. Instead, Christians are to grow under the unity of a local church. This, he says, is one of the greatest ways unbelievers can see and experience the love of Christians. Finally, he argues that every aspect of a Christian's life must be marked by the Gospel. The very core of their existence must always point to the personal God who is there and who is not silent.

### Critical Evaluation

As this book so evidently shows, unless a Christian can clearly understand the assumptions and worldviews of modern men, he will be utterly impotent to share the Christian faith. In The God Who is There, Francis Schaeffer offers a thoughtful, sobering, and eye-opening book that analyses how modern men have sunk below the "line of despair" and what Christians must do to present the Gospel in such a way that they can understand.

The church is in dire need of reading The God Who is There. Rare is the Christian man who is well versed in philosophy and can properly analyze it through the Christian worldview. Francis Schaeffer is not only one of these men--he is a teacher to them. Indeed, while modern man continues to plunge

down the line of despair, Christians seem to be standing over the chasm--completely ignorant to how secularists actually view the world. The church needs more men like him to analyze the secular culture. This book is applicable to scholars and laymen alike. Though there is a plethora of citations concerning terminology and history, the book is neither too analytical nor too simple for anyone not to read it. With the help of twenty one very short chapters and an extensive table of contents, the reader is able to track along with the author's logical reasoning and the direction of his thought. Additionally, the author has included many diagrams throughout his book to help his reader view his ideas in picture form.

Arguably, the "line of despair" illustration must be one of the greatest keys to understanding our culture. Through this important concept, Schaeffer lays down the foundation for the entire book and draws its inferences very clearly. Namely, man has lost his perception of reality and embraced subjective truth. Though this may be such a simple concept, it is foundationally important to understand that many people wrongfully view this world with ungrounded romanticism. They have no ground for their reasoning.

Schaeffer not only corrects modern society, but the church as well. The inferences drawn from his arguments underline a major error among Evangelicals; they are merely mowing the surface level weeds, not reaching in and ripping out the root of the issue. Hot subject topics like homosexuality, gay marriage, sexual immorality, and abortion are all clear violations against what God has declared in Scripture. Yet, if these things (as terrible as they are) are fought against without a clear teaching of the underlying worldview, the Christian is left beating the air. As Schaeffer said, we must be willing to define a word at length so that our speech may not be mere connotation words.

The author is characterized by a rare conviction of truth that is absent from our world today. Armed with Scripture, Schaeffer loves people enough to confront their inconsistencies. He is not afraid. He even claims that one of his former students (now a Christian) attempted to commit suicide after he led her to see the outcome of her conclusions. Even if she would have killed herself, he says, he would have begun the same way with the next person who came. Additionally, Schaeffer possesses a genuine love for lost souls. Concerning the depth of man's despair, Schaeffer says, "Dare we laugh at such things?" and These men are dying while they live; yet where is our compassion for them? There is nothing more ugly than a Christian orthodoxy without understanding or without compassion. May this quote be seared into every Christian's mind.

### Conclusion

The God Who is There by Francis Schaeffer foretells the roots of postmodernism through the Christian worldview and teaches other Christians how to share the Gospel with modern man. While opposing worldviews yank men closer and closer to nihilism, Schaeffer presents the Gospel message to a dying world. Undeniably, this book holds the words of truth that can liberate man from the lethal pangs of postmodernism. Indeed, The God Who is There by Francis Schaeffer proves to be a vital instrument the church must heed. His passion for truth is addicting, his boldness is convicting, and his analysis of western culture is spot-on. Unless the church wakes up from the stupor it finds itself in, it will only lag further and further behind its secular contemporaries.