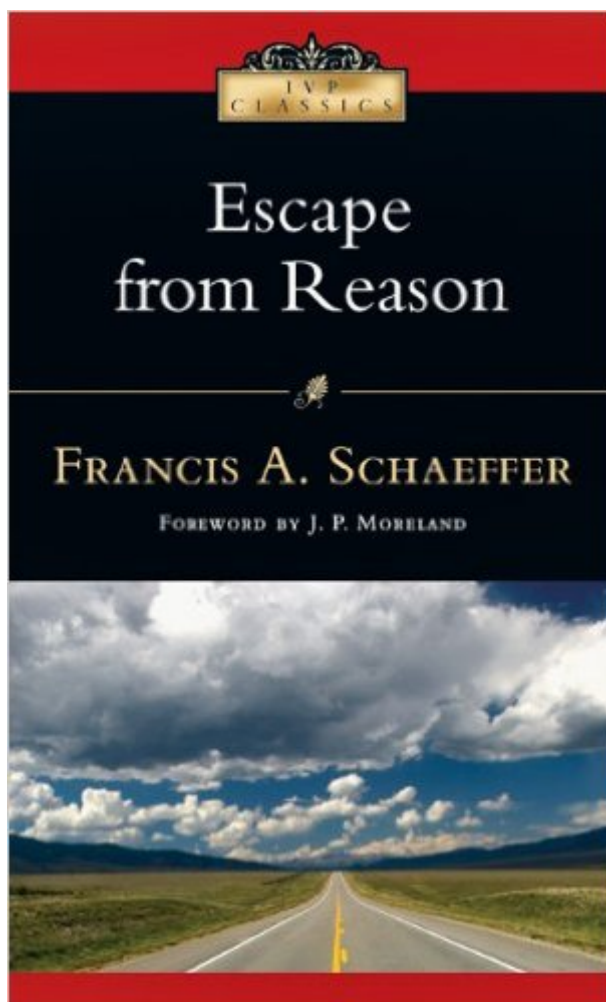


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Escape From Reason (IVP Classics)



Synopsis

Truth used to be based on reason. No more. What we feel is now the truest source of reality. Despite our obsession with the emotive and the experiential, we still face anxiety, despair, and purposelessness. How did we get here? And where do we find a remedy? In this modern classic, Francis A. Schaeffer traces trends in twentieth-century thought and unpacks how key ideas have shaped our society. Wide-ranging in his analysis, Schaeffer examines philosophy, science, art and popular culture to identify dualism, fragmentation and the decline of reason. Schaeffer's work takes on a newfound relevance today in his prescient anticipation of the contemporary postmodern ethos. His critique demonstrates Christianity's promise for a new century, one in as much need as ever of purpose and hope.

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Customer Reviews

Do you value liberty, reason, science, individualism and progress? If so, read this short book by Christian philosopher Francis Schaeffer to learn why these and other western values are hanging in the balance today. Schaeffer offers an explanation of the Renaissance, Reformation and Enlightenment that is in agreement with the traditional view of history that our most cherished western values are fruits of our Judeo-Christian tradition. This view has been promoted by such thinkers as Burke, Tocqueville and Acton. An excellent modern defense is given by M. Stanton Evans in his book *The Theme is Freedom*. Schaeffer's treatment is philosophically deep and historically broad, although the book's short length severely limits consideration of detail. Schaeffer

sees the true beginning of the humanistic Renaissance in the work of Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274). Aquinas' dualistic Grace/Nature scheme was useful in many ways, but its critical flaw was in failing to recognize man's fallen intellect along with his fallen will. Aquinas saw man's intellect as essentially undamaged by the Fall. This had the unfortunate consequence of setting up man's intellect as autonomous and independent. Aquinas adapted parts of Greek philosophy to Christianity, perhaps most importantly (and with the most negative consequences) the dualistic view of man and world as represented by the Grace/Nature split. As Schaeffer stresses, the main danger of a dualistic scheme is that, eventually, the lower sphere "eats up" the upper sphere. Another way to say the same thing is, once the lower sphere is given "autonomy," it tends to deny the existence or importance of whatever is in the upper sphere in support of its own autonomy.

When reading Schaeffer, we have to bear in mind that he was dealing primarily with effects rather than intentions the discussed authors in his book produced in the Western world. Instead of discussing motives and intentions of the mentioned authors, Schaeffer was interested in understanding of the concepts as accepted and processed by the Western intellectual establishment. Schaeffer was interested in conceptual understanding of the history of philosophy and the development of the Western culture, and how such mentality reflects on communication of Christian message. We might say, he was interested in how rationality supports our lives and why it fails to keep us existentially stabile. This intention has been effectively reflected in *Escape from Reason*. Following his intention, I think it would be useless to read *Escape from Reason* outside this conceptual framework. It simply wouldn't suffice as it exceeds the scope of his project. Personally, I've come across Schaeffer quite late in my Christian career. It's a great pity I haven't found him much earlier in my Christian walk when I needed such encouragement and conceptual engagement. Until recently - more precisely, until Plantinga's encouragement and strong leadership - conservative Christian intellectuals demonstrated an inherent inability to engage popular culture. Lack of confidence and a certain disorientation with respect to limits and conceptual permissions characterised a lot of apologetic Christian thought in the 20th century. Why? Simply because most prominent Christian and ex-Christian thinkers, as part of the same culture, did not feel a burden to defend their faith. Instead, they felt the need to explore their faith in a critical way.

First, I have to express appreciation for Schaeffer. When I was in high school, I read through all of his books with great interest and avidity. He (along with C. S. Lewis) was a great example to me that you could be a Christian and still have a brain. I thought. Unfortunately, his books led to actually

read the individuals he discussed. I went on to attend Yale University and the University of Chicago, studying theology and philosophy at both places. At Yale I met several Christian grad students who, like me, initially became interested in philosophy through reading Schaeffer. Every single one of us was grateful to Schaeffer. Every single one of us agreed: Schaeffer probably never read any of the people he discusses. If you have just a little background in philosophy or the history of theology, and you look carefully through the footnotes of any of Schaeffer's books, it becomes fairly obvious that his reading was restricted almost entirely to secondary sources. He didn't read Aquinas so much as books about Aquinas. He seems to have been especially indebted to books by Dutch Reformed scholars. Most of his discussions of the great figures in the history of the church are travesties of their actual thought. An example: Kierkegaard. Most of my graduate work both at Yale and Chicago was on Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard is a widely misunderstood scholar, but virtually everyone who has studied his work at any length will acknowledge that he was not a theological innovator, that he in no sense was trying to undermine Christian faith, and that he was utterly orthodox in his thought. It is impossible to find a single orthodox Christian doctrine that Kierkegaard attacks. In no sense is Kierkegaard an opponent of Christianity.

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