

Christian and Modern Art

Father, we want to praise You for another beautiful day. We thank You that every aspect of the creation speaks to us of its being designed and full of order, beauty, and meaning. Father, we thank You that we live in a world that we know is created. We are not in a world that is uncertain and meaningless, going nowhere and coming from nowhere. We thank You, Father, that we live before You, the eternal and true God, our creator and redeemer. We ask that You will be with us in this time together, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Let us start on this next article, which is the one called "The Christian and Modern Art." It is from *The Bible Today* in March 1951. I found it very interesting reading this article. It is the first thing of Schaeffer's that I have come across that he wrote where he talks about the arts in any detail. We have a couple of references already in one or two of these other articles that we have looked at.

Let us recall where he has come from in this area. In his own background, he had no encouragement to be interested in the arts from his family or early education. Edith, whose own family background was very different, sparked his interest. There was much more of a delight in artistic things. It grew into life and took form on his first trip to Europe. As he went around visiting Christians all over Europe after the war in 1947, he found out the state of the churches there, he went to churches, cathedrals, and museums during every spare moment he had. He went to look at paintings and sculptures all over Europe, and he enjoyed himself enormously. Then it was spurred on and informed by his meeting with Hans Rookmaaker.

We said that he met Rookmaaker in Holland at the first gathering of the International Council of Christian Churches in 1948 when they came back to live in Europe. They were on their way to Switzerland, and they stopped off for a few weeks in Holland. Every day he met Rookmaaker, who was at that time a young art critic. Later he became a professor of art history at the University of Amsterdam and wrote several books on art. Schaeffer and Rookmaaker discussed a lot together. You will notice in this article that he acknowledges his debt to Rookmaaker very early on. He says on page 163, "In writing on art, I acknowledge with pleasure the stimulating conversations I have had on this subject with a young Christian art critic of Amsterdam, A. M. Rookmaaker." Schaeffer had a growing interest in the arts.

The thesis of this article is that "there is no better way to understand the basic worldview of a period of history than to study its art forms." This is a thesis that would become one of the major themes of his teaching through the next years. Here it is first formally stated. Schaeffer is simply saying that art is not created in a vacuum. You do not have someone who has a gift of painting or music who just goes out and paints. What people paint reflects the period in which they live and the worldview of the period in which they live. In a way, the arts reflect it better than anyone else. They often tell you which direction culture is going in. There are people who reflect and express with their creativity what is beginning to happen in the world around them. We often look at paintings or listen to music as if it was created in a vacuum. If you stop and think about it for one moment, though, it is nonsense. As soon as you begin to know anything about art, you can look at a painting or listen to a piece of music and say, for example, "That piece of music was written in India." It sounds so totally different from Western music. A piece of art might clearly come from the Byzantine time period, or it could be an icon from the Eastern Church. A piece of art could obviously be painted in the twentieth century. As soon as you begin to know anything about art, you can tell some of these things. It is the same with music. You can go to a concert and, if you know anything about music, you can say the time period of when it was written. There is a progression of art. No matter how creative an artist is, she will express her creativity in a way that tells you an enormous amount about the culture from which she has come. Art is not produced in a vacuum. Schaeffer makes the point that art shows us the general worldview of an age.

Art also displays people's religious thinking as well. He gives a couple of examples from theology. He mentions a Catholic illustration by painter Hans Baldung of "Christ in the Stable." There is the baby Christ in the stable, and in that picture the light emanates from the baby. There is no other source of light coming from anywhere. There is no light coming in from a window or a lantern. This tells you something about Catholic theology of the incarnation and the person of Christ. If you look at the paintings of Christ done by Rembrandt, who was a Protestant influenced by the Reformation, they are very different. In his nativity scenes, for example, the baby Christ is a normal human baby. He is really human; he does not have light coming out of himself. The glory of His divinity is veiled. He has emptied himself, as Paul says. Wherever you see a painting of Christ during His lifetime, He is an ordinary human person. Any light in the picture comes from some other source of light. He uses the illustration of Joseph holding a lantern, which casts light on the baby's face. Schaeffer says, "The only time you see Rembrandt painting Christ with light coming from Himself is after the resurrection." There is a painting of Christ with the disciples He met on the Emmaus road. In this picture, the light comes from Christ. It also comes from the window in Rembrandt's picture, so there is real light as well. Ordinary light comes from the sun through the window, but genuine light comes from Christ Himself. That reflects Rembrandt's theology, because he knows that after His resurrection, Christ is glorified. Jesus Himself told the disciples that some of them would not taste death until they had seen the kingdom of God coming in power. That is what Rembrandt illustrates in that painting.

Schaeffer gives another example of how theology is reflected in his painting. It is a wonderful painting that some of you may be familiar with. It became one of Schaeffer's favorite examples that he referred to over and over again through the years. It was one of his favorite paintings, that is Rembrandt's painting of the erection of the cross. Christ has been nailed on the cross, and now the cross is lifted up to be put in its hole in the ground. If you look at the painting closely, you will see that one of the people who lifts up the cross wears a Dutch painter's cap and is Rembrandt himself. It is a marvelous painting in which Rembrandt says in the clearest possible way that his sin is responsible for the death of Christ. Christ died because of Rembrandt's sins. Schaeffer uses these as illustrations of how theology is reflected in art of every kind.

He then goes on in the article to discuss modern art. He wants to encourage Christians to begin to take modern art more seriously. He starts off with a discussion of some of the techniques. His point is that many people reject modern art because they say it is distorted, unrealistic, bizarre, different, and experimental. They do not feel like they relate to it at all.

He starts off by pointing out that some of the techniques that modern art uses are not modern at all. All artists throughout history have used these techniques. He gives examples of this, the first of which is the distortion of reality to heighten effect. The acropolis is a fascinating example of this. The Greeks built the acropolis with slanted lines. They are not in perfect perspective; it was not built absolutely square. This creates an effect of heightening its size and its lines. He gives another example from El Greco, and probably many of you have seen paintings by El Greco. He paints Christ as He is suffering in an enormously elongated way. It heightens the effect of suffering that you experience when you look at the picture. Schaeffer says artists have always used the distortion of reality to heighten an effect.

He also points out the way time and space may be changed in order to communicate something. This has always been true in the arts. It is not just in modern art that you see time telescoped or that you see something that is an abnormal relationship of things in space to each other. He gives several examples of paintings where you see several events of a person's life at different times put together in order to tell you something about the person. You have different times and different space put into the same painting. We may say there is something different in some modern art, because when time and space are distorted in modern art they try to say something rather different. It communicates that everything is relative, going back to what we said about Einstein's theory of relativity.

Fourth, Schaeffer mentions the use of the spectacular and unusual to gain effect for its own sake, which is common to modern art and earlier art. He gives some examples from Gertrude Stein and an amusing one from Picasso. He changed his views on Picasso later on. He does not speak very favorably about him here. He says that in modern art, and this is not completely new, you get people doing spectacular, unusual, and novel things simply to create an effect. When he speaks of Gertrude Stein, he talks about someone who did not use normal syntax in her poetry. You could think of some modern examples of this. Probably all of you have heard of this guy who goes around wrapping up buildings, bits of the California coastline, mountains, and forests. Here is a guy who has found a technique that makes money. He has found something spectacular to do that is unusual. One could not really call it art, but it certainly made him a living. Schaeffer says, “The spectacular is not something new in modern art. There is just simply perhaps more of it.”

One of the worst examples I have ever seen was at an exhibition at the Wentworth Gallery in London that I went to a couple of years ago. They often have good exhibitions there, but this particular one was really awful. One of the pieces was called the artist’s breath. It was only a collapsed balloon sitting on a little wooden block. That was a piece of art. Someone has come up with a novel idea, but you can hardly call it great art. That is one of the problems we face today. It is very easy for Christians to dismiss modern art because so many people just do the spectacular and novel. People will look at it and say it is all like that, and none of it is worth looking at. It is important not to dismiss it like that, though. There have always been artists like that who have done spectacular things.

The fifth thing Schaeffer points out is that some modern art is experimentation in line, color, and materials. He gives the illustration of Scandinavian design, where some of what was put on display in fine art museums was in fact drawings and experiments that were done in relationship to the development of designs for furniture and buildings in the new Scandinavian design. He suggests that it should be thought of as applied art rather than belonging in a museum of fine arts. There is a lot of modern art that is like that. You can go in almost any modern art museum, and you will find examples of computer designs. They are now very popular, but one cannot really call that fine art. It is more like applied art. They are examples of experimentation with techniques that are available through the new technology.

Beyond this, Schaeffer wants to look at what modern art actually does. This is the heart of the article. He says, “It is very important that Christians do not respond to modern art by saying it means nothing. Christians ought to attempt to understand modern art. The general response of the Christian is simply to withdraw from modern art and to say we do not like it, we do not immediately understand it, so we do not want to have anything to do with it. No, we have got to be prepared to try to understand it, because then we understand something about the people among whom we live. Artists are like prophets of a doomed world, and modern art has been like that. It has been like a series of prophecies of what is happening in our culture. Artists are often very sensitive ahead of time to the direction in which a culture is going.” Here Schaeffer pleads, and this was almost 60 years ago, for Christians to be sensitive to modern art if we actually want to understand the culture in which we live. There are several points I want to make here about this.

The first point is that, as we look at modern art, we can begin to understand where people are and where our culture is. There are several points that Schaeffer makes. In much modern art we see the loss of meaning and certainty. We have already thought about this in the context of the general culture. It is expressed in a very dramatic way in much modern art, whether we think about painting, sculpture, music, theater, novels, or short stories. The modern artist often presents to us a world that is chaotic, a world where there is unrelatedness rather than relatedness, and a sense of nightmare. In this we see a cry of lostness and desperation.

Later on Schaeffer uses examples from modern film. Think of Bergman’s films *The Silence*, *The Hour of the Wolf*, or *Persona*. Several of Bergman’s films have the quality of the nightmare most clearly. You feel like you

are in a really bad dream when you watch one of his films. Schaeffer also later used the example of John Cage, who purposely made his music as chance music. I remember going to a lecture of his 40 years ago. He actually produced on stage some chance music. It was really quite extraordinary, because he had this enormous computer, which today would probably be in a little box, but it took up a space about 10 feet long, three feet deep, and eight feet high. He had a technician with him in order to help him produce this chance music. I thought it was a tremendous irony to start with that, in order to get totally unrelated sounds, he had to have this extraordinary, complicated, mathematical and technical machine. That is exactly the opposite of a piece of chance. He did not appear to see the total discontinuity, though! If you have ever listened to any of John Cage's music, he very purposely produces music where the sounds have no melody. They have no formal structure, and there is no particular relationship between the bits of noise that you hear.

In the film *How Should We Then Live* very much later, Schaeffer actually had a scene of John Cage playing one of his pieces. It is "A Piece For Closed Piano." John Cage comes out to a piano in the street, sets an alarm clock for two minutes, and sits down at the piano. He closes the lid of the piano and just sits there in absolute silence. When the two minutes are up, he turns off the alarm, opens up the piano again, and stands up. Everyone applauds because that was his music. He wrote another piece "For Twelve Radio Stations" where you had to tune them arbitrarily to different stations and play them all at the same time. I saw another piece of his on television a couple of years ago in Britain. He produced a piece of music sort of like an opera. The words were taken from James Joyce's novel *Ulysses*, which has a breakdown of normal syntax in it. His directions for the sound said you had to take the center word on the eighth line of every page throughout the book. That is how the text of the opera was made up. In others words, it had words that bore no relationship to each other at all except that they occurred in this book. There were various musical instruments used in it as well.

Cage's music is a perfect illustration of what Schaeffer speaks about here regarding the loss of meaning and certainty and the use of chaos and unrelatedness. Cage understood that very well. He created music that said that we live in a chance universe. We are a product of chance; everything around us is a product of chance. My music will be a product of chance in order to show that. This is one thing that we see in a great deal of modern art: the loss of meaning and certainty. This is reflected in plays like Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*. Another one of his is *Happy Days*, which is a play where you have a person up to their waste in a rubbish heap. All they have is a toothbrush and some toothpaste, and there is a monologue going on. Another one of his is called *Breath*, where he reached the very end of what he could say and the play was only three sounds: a baby crying, the sound of a couple copulating, and the sound of someone dying. There are no words at all. That is where Beckett came to in the end. You get the sense of total absurdity in a great deal of modern art, whether it is music, films, or theater.

A second thing that Schaeffer mentions regarding understanding where people are through modern art is the idea that civilization is only a veneer. Underneath that veneer is the primitive, the animal, and the savage. We see that in a great deal of modern art. For instance, a period of French art was very much modeled on primitivism. Some of the work of Picasso and Gogan were this way. They glorify the savage and the primitive. Not only is civilization a veneer, but artistic conventions are also a veneer. Modern art felt free to break totally with the conventions of the past because it saw them as simply a veneer produced by the civilization from which they came. All the normal canons of art can break down completely once you regard civilization and culture simply as a kind of veneer.

In modern art, one of the things we see is what you could call the skull beneath the skin. That is a phrase from Webster in the early seventeenth century. In modern art over and over again, you see something ugly, evil, and savage underneath the veneer of civilization. I remember an exhibition that was here in Saint Louis by de Kooning at the art gallery. He expressed this in a very dramatic way. You went in, and he had absolutely beautiful things that made you want to reach out and touch them. One was like a jewel box that was very

beautiful. When you put your hand out to touch it, it was filled with very sharp pins that were almost invisible. It was only when you got very close that you realized they were there. There was a surface of beauty, and behind that was pain, suffering, and violence. Many of his pieces were like that. They had the appearance of beauty and civilization, but underneath it was something very sharp, painful, and hurting. The other thing we see in considering that civilization is only a veneer is the animal behind the human. In many modern paintings, you see human beings presented under the form of animals. The human is simply a veneer over the animal from which man is supposed to have developed.

Related to understanding where people are through modern art is that personality has no basis. In a great deal of modern art, you see the breakdown of the human. I have seen art exhibitions in which human beings are presented as machines. I remember a very striking one where in place of a person's eyes there were watches in some statues. The idea is that everything that goes on inside a person is simply mechanical. There is not a real human being there. Human beings might be made of bits of old rubbish that has been thrown away. This makes the same kind of statement. Jack Amity's statues are always individual human beings in total isolation from each other. These elongated figures always walk off in different directions from one another. They have no human relationships at all. There is an acknowledgement that human personality has no basis, and ultimately we come from the impersonal. The things we regard as precious (love, relationship, individual significance, our uniqueness from the animals and the mechanical) rests on a lie. Ultimately this is not true. The human is broken down.

Fourth we see that morality is only a social convention. You see this very frequently in films. In a recent lesson I mentioned *Blow Up*, which is a very good example of this. Morality, whether in terms of sexual morality or regarding murder as murder, is clearly declared to be simply a social convention. It does not rest on any final distinction between good and evil. Morality has no solid foundation, and everything decays.

The theme of decay and fragmentation is repeated over and over again in a great deal of modern art. This is the first point that Schaeffer makes regarding how we can understand where people are and where culture is based on modern art. This does not apply to all of modern art. I made some generalizations, just as Schaeffer did. As we look at modern art, it gives us some understanding about where our culture is.

Second, Schaeffer makes the point that the modern arts are more honest than modern theology. He says that basically modern theology and the modern arts have the same message, but the artists are more honest than the theologians. They have the same message of uncertainty, loss of meaning, and the relative. These are some of the things that we looked at in the last few lessons. Even though they believe the same thing, that human significance rests on a void and there is ultimately no meaning, they carry on using "God" words. The artist is much more honest and portrays reality as he really sees and knows it.

Let me quote the discussion between Jasper and Bultmann. Jasper was a Swiss existentialist who used to tell his students that if they took his lecture seriously they would have to recognize that they may end up committing suicide. He regarded that as one of the real options that his students were left with when they understood how clearly he regarded life as completely meaningless. He had a debate once with Rudolph Bultmann, the very radical neo-orthodox theologian. At the end of the debate he said to Bultmann, "Surely you and I are saying just the same thing." Bultmann replied that they were saying the same thing. Ultimately reality is completely absurd. Jasper asked him, "Why then all this "God" language? Why talk about Christianity, encountering Christ, and faith?" Bultmann said he had to have something to say to people in need. Schaeffer's point is very profound here. He says that the artists who portray life as a nightmare are being much more honest than the modern theologians who think it is a nightmare but still carry on preaching the Gospel as if it were true when they do not really believe that it is. Modern theology has the illusion of meaning but with no basis. Modern art recognizes that there is no meaning and tells you quite honestly. Schaeffer suggests that this has far more

integrity to it to be straight about the fact that life is absurd. They feel the human has no foundation, there is no basis for morality, and the skull is only just beneath the skin.

The third point that Schaeffer makes as he thinks about modern art and the Christian understanding it is that in the past men who rejected Christianity have been inconsistent. They have rejected the biblical message about God, Christ, and our being called to live under God's Word and authority, but they tried to keep inconsistently the biblical world. To think that you could have a moral, ordered, and meaningful society without God and Christ was dishonest. It was inconsistent and a form of cheating to believe that you could have the results of Christianity without having Christianity itself. You cannot have the relationship, the moral framework that it gives, the sense of meaning and certainty, and the basis for rationality if you dispense with God as an outmoded idea. Schaeffer says you see in modern art the more consistent recognition that if you get rid of God you have to be prepared to let go of everything else that comes with Him. This includes rationality, meaning to the individual life, a basis for morality, and a basis for an ordered society. The modern artist is like the existentialist who says let us be serious about what it means that God is dead.

Schaeffer says, "It is as though God has released men to experience the consequences of their rebellion." Though he does not tie it into Romans 1, he makes the point that Paul makes there. When people refuse to have God in their knowledge, when they suppress the truth of God, God gives them over to all those things that Paul lists there. He gives them to a debased mind, immorality, and the breakdown of every kind of social convention. As you read Romans 1, it is like a prophecy of our society, which has turned away from God and lives to experience its results. Some of it is very dramatic. Think of the expression on homosexuality in Romans 1 about sowing themselves the seeds of their own destruction. That has been so appallingly fulfilled in our culture with AIDS and the spread of every other kind of venereal disease. If we turn away from God and refuse to have Him in our knowledge, we have to work out in time the consequences of what that rebellion will mean in our everyday life.

This is the point that Schaeffer makes. In the past people rejected Christianity but still tried to hold on to what it gave. But today we see in modern art people who have rejected Christianity who try to be consistent to what it means. They begin to experience in their art the result of the rejection of God. When Schaeffer made this statement in the 1940s and 1950s, it was a prophetic statement. There were very few Christians who understood at the time that modern art was a prophecy of what was happening in our whole culture. Most Christians simply dismissed it out of hand and said they did not understand it. It was irrational, it did not make sense, it was not beautiful, they could not make it mean anything, so they ignored it and went their own way. Schaeffer said we need to look at it because it tells us what happens in our culture as a whole. Artists are, generally speaking, on the front wave of a civilization as it moves forward. The whole of the rest of the culture is dragged along behind in the undertow from that wave. Today we see this: things the artists wrote, painted, and put into their music 40 or 50 years ago are now an everyday part of our society. They are an everyday part of the breakdown of the culture in which we live.

The fourth point that Schaeffer makes is that if we make an effort to understand the drift of our age, and art provides a window into it, we may protect ourselves against the drift. The Christian who says he cannot be bothered to understand what happens and it is not worth looking at it is much more likely to be carried along behind the wave. If we do not think about what happens in our culture, we often have no means of resisting the direction in which it goes. It is only as we arm ourselves by understanding it that we can stand up against it. We could apply this in many areas; the most obvious one is materialism. If we do not think carefully about the materialism of our culture, we get washed away with it. It is only as we understand it that we can stand up against it. This is true in every area, and Schaeffer applies this to the whole drift of our age toward meaninglessness and the breakdown of morality.

The fifth point Schaeffer makes is that as we understand modern art we will have a point of contact to communicate with the people of our age. He ends the article on page 169, "There are many people whom we may reach for Christ far better if we have an understanding of these things which exhibit the basic modern viewpoint. Therefore we can understand something of that by which today's men are bound, not only in spiritual darkness but in an intellectual and emotional darkness which alternately are rooted and spring from that spiritual darkness." Familiarity with modern art is a point of contact. If we see, hear, and understand the same things that people around us see, hear, and understand, we have a better chance of communicating with people. These are the major points that he makes in this article.

Let me add a few final comments. It has been fashionable to criticize Schaeffer as what you might call a culture vulture. I have heard people say that about him, and I have read things written about him like that. Some people have dismissed him in that way. They have said he is not a professional art critique, he had no proper training, and he never went to school to study the arts, so we must regard him simply as a culture vulture. They accuse him of being someone who comments on art because it was a fashionable thing to do or trendy. It might appear to be clever and intellectual to make comments on modern art. Many times I have seen any of the comments he makes about the arts dismissed simply because he did not have professional training. The assumption is that he was a culture vulture. One can point out mistakes that he made sometimes in his criticism because he was not professionally trained. But it does not help to dismiss him as a semi-literal artistic philistine, which people sometimes do. He tried to understand things himself, and he had behind many of his comments the professional understanding of Hans Rookmaaker. They spent many hours over the years in discussion together about the kinds of things that Schaeffer said about the arts.

In response to that criticism that he was a culture vulture, let me make several points. First, he was genuinely interested in art. He really delighted in seeing, hearing, and watching things that were created by other human beings. He saw their creativity as a wonderful expression of what it means that human beings are made in the image of God. Second, he was very anxious to understand the people of our day. He quite rightly saw that the modern arts are often the very best way to understand where people are.

Third, he genuinely respected the honesty of the consistency that you see in a lot of modern art. It becomes a howl or cry of desperation. Think of Francis Bacon's paintings, for example, some of which you may have seen. There is one of his of a cardinal in a glass cage. All you can see is an appalling howl on his face; there is no more of the head properly visible. Many of Francis Bacon's paintings are like that. They have a nightmarish quality and demonstrate a tremendous anguish of human beings facing life. Schaeffer respected the honesty of the consistency that without God life becomes like that. That honesty was expressed in the fragmentation of meaning and form. That is one of the unique things about modern art. In expressing its message, if it is to do it with any artistic integrity, it has to express it with a fragmentation of form as well. You cannot really paint a message of total absurdity as if you were still painting something beautiful because you say that it is not beautiful. The form reflects that breakdown of meaning. It reflects the fragmentation of understanding.

Fourth, Schaeffer was aware of the danger to the church. The church was not sensitive to culture. Finally, and the most important thing, is that Schaeffer had a tremendous passion to communicate to people. He was not interested in going to see things just because people would think he was clever. He had a tremendous passion to communicate to people. God used that over and over again. The young people who flowed to L'Abri in Switzerland over the years saw in him someone who really understood what they experienced. He understood the culture in which they lived that shaped the way they thought. They did not regard him as someone who tried to be trendy. They saw a man who sought to have a compassionate understanding of where they were. He wanted to answer the questions, needs, and struggles that were raised so acutely in so much of modern art.

Sometimes people have thought that Schaeffer was simply negative about modern art, but he was not at all. When he speaks in what appears to be a negative way, he does not dismiss what is said and communicated in modern art. He really weeps for the people who produce these things and their lostness that is expressed so clearly in their work. His negative comments are not dismissals. It is the same with Rookmaaker. For instance, in his book on modern art, *Modern Art and the Death of a Culture*, people have felt that he was being negative. He was not being negative in a dismissing kind of sense. He was weeping for what that art expresses.

It has been asked, “If this is part of the Reformed tradition, why is it so lacking in the Reformed tradition today? Why is there so little encouragement to young Christians to be involved in the arts and other cultural areas like that?” I would say that it is partly because the term “Reformed” in the United States took on a narrower meaning than it had historically. If you asked anyone in Holland or Switzerland what it meant to be Reformed, they would reply that to be Reformed is to understand that the whole of life comes under the authority of God. God is the creator of all things. He calls us to understand that everything we do, think, and say belongs to God. God’s sovereignty has to be understood as God’s lordship over everything. He calls us as His servants to manifest that lordship over everything. This is one of the central themes of Calvinism historically; it is one of the great contributions that Calvin made. Abraham Kuyper wrote a wonderful book on the contribution of Calvin. It was the unique contribution that Calvin made at the Reformation. He made other unique contributions as well, but particularly it was the recognition that the whole of culture, society, and life is to come under the authority of Christ. That has always been a central part of the Reformed tradition. In the United States, particularly in the last 50 or 60 years, “Reformed” has tended to take on the narrower meaning of a stress on the sovereignty of God in the sense of God as sovereign in salvation through election. That has always been a part of Reformed theology too, but it has simply been one part of the emphasis on the lordship and sovereignty of God. It was not seen as the central part of and the only distinctive of what being Reformed is. If you ask someone from Britain or America what it means to be Reformed, they would probably say that it is an emphasis on the grace of God in salvation. If you ask someone from the European continent, they will say it is an emphasis on the lordship of Christ over the whole of life.

Let us talk about why this has happened, that there has been a retreat from that traditional Reformed understanding. The simple reason is exactly what Schaeffer gets at in this article. Often Christians do not understand what happens in our modern culture, so their response is to retreat from it. We do not understand what happens, we do not like it, so we retreat from it into our Christian sub-culture. We are frightened of what it will do to our children and to us, so we simply withdraw from the life of the general culture. We leave the general culture to the devil and all his works to the world. We will develop our own Christian art and music. You see that today: there are Christian television stations, radio stations, and art. But the only people who ever see it or listen to it are Christians. It is not a contribution to the general culture. It is not an acknowledgement of the lordship over the whole of life. It is simply a sub-culture trying to be completely self-sufficient on the side to avoid having contact with the world. God’s challenge in His Word is that we actually be light in the world and salt in the earth. He does not call us to a sub-culture. It is a very serious mistake we have made in withdrawing.

The challenge to every Christian church, school of every level, and institution, particularly Reformed ones who have had the emphasis that is so thoroughly biblical that the whole of life belongs to God, is that we should be preparing people to make a contribution in the general culture, not in our sub-culture. Often in our sub-culture the standards are very poor. These are standards that would not be acceptable for one moment out in the general culture. Franky Schaeffer wrote a book called *Addicted to Mediocrity* in which he said that by retreating from the general culture we have been able to substitute well meaning for quality. If we were involved in the general culture, very often no one would buy the things that we produce. Schaeffer saw this very clearly. He saw that an emphasis on understanding, being involved in, and making a contribution to the general culture was a part of the Reformed tradition. It is not helpful to get caught in a side stream or tributary that flows off in some other

direction of its own. Christ has called us to serve Him here in the world. That is His calling to us. It is tremendously important that we recognize that calling and commit ourselves, our families, our churches, and all of our Christian institutions to it.

I can understand why people are afraid of our culture. I do not want to be critical on that level. It is simply a matter of having confidence in the power and grace of God. As those who are Reformed, above all people, we ought to have grace and confidence in the power and lordship of Christ that enables us to go out into the general culture and set up signs of His kingdom. We should do this rather than hide our light under a cover, which is what we do. God calls us to be in the world; Christ came and lived in the world. He was seen in the world, and He calls us to do the same. We do not need to be afraid, but we need to fear God. Scripture tells us to fear God, not the devil or the world. God is the one we fear most of all. If we fear Him, then we are prepared to obey Him by serving Him, bringing the whole of life under His authority out in the world.

Practically, Schaeffer and Rookmaaker had an enormous impact in Britain. They began to speak in the 1950s and 1960s in Britain into a context where evangelicals of all stripes, including Reformed evangelicals, had retreated totally from the general culture. It was considered completely worldly in the 1950s and 1960s for young Christians to go into any area of the arts. It was considered an unspiritual, carnal thing to do. Any Christian who wanted to become a painter, ballet dancer, opera singer, actor, writer, or musician, unless it was to do something sacred in a corner, was regarded as being unspiritual and not really devoted to Christ. As Schaeffer and Rookmaaker came to England and did quite a lot of speaking in colleges, universities, high schools, and to groups of Christian students here and there, it had an enormous impact under the grace of God. There was a change, not in the older generation, but in the younger generation. A whole generation of young Christians started going into all the fields of the arts. They have begun to make a contribution there.

Steve Turner is one of the results of that. It was very moving at Rookmaaker's and Schaeffer's memorial services in London, both held at All Souls, to hear various people who came forward who were involved in the arts in Britain. Every single one of them said the reason he or she was a poet, a singer, or a writer was because Schaeffer or Rookmaaker encouraged him or her to be and told them that it was not a worldly thing to do. Here you have people who really make a contribution and are being read or seen in the general culture as well as by Christians. That is where we have to seek to make a contribution. If that can happen in Britain where less than 5% of the population is evangelical, it can certainly happen in the United States, where probably far more than 5% of the population is Reformed. A huge percentage of the population is evangelical. We really need to take Schaeffer's challenge seriously.