



Addicted to Mediocrity (Revised Edition): Contemporary Christians and the Arts

Frank Schaeffer, Kurt Mitchell (Illustrator)

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In this provocative book, Franky Schaeffer shows how Christians today have sacrificed the artistic prominence they enjoyed for centuries and settled instead for mediocrity. The evidence for this sad state of affairs abounds. We are flooded with "Christian" doodads, trinkets, t-shirts, bumper stickers, etc., that use God's name as an advertising slogan--"Things Go Better with Jesus"--putting the Creator of the universe on the same level as soda pop! Moreover, Schaeffer writes, "Whenever Christians, and evangelicals in particular, have attempted to 'reach the world' through the media--TV, film, publishing and so on--the thinking public gets the firm idea that, like soup in a bad restaurant, Christians' brains are best left unstirred."

But it doesn't have to be this way. Schaeffer shows how Christians who care can begin to reverse the slide toward mediocrity: by demanding excellence in the arts and media, and in all areas of life; by giving our time, talents and money to those things which are worthy of our support and are truly honoring to God; by staying away from the cheap, the shoddy, and the make-a-fast-buck mentality.

Schaeffer offers not only an unflinching critique, but specific and practical direction for becoming "unaddicted," and for recovering artistic excellence. The punch, humor and satire of the text is effectively enhanced by nineteen original drawings by Chicago artist Kurt Mitchell.

Addicted to Mediocrity (Revised Edition): Contemporary Christians and the Arts Details

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From Reader Review Addicted to Mediocrity (Revised Edition): Contemporary Christians and the Arts for online ebook

Amani Bryant says

An important message packed into a beautifully short package, however, this only gets 3 stars for a few reasons:

- 1) important message, but DUH. maybe it's not so obvious to some people, but for me the whole thing was a "no duh" experience.
- 2) i didn't feel like there were many solutions offered, and those that were put forth were pretty vague.

James says

a stinging indictment on the state of Christianity and the Arts. The artistic vision of Schaeffer is lacking however. Great critique, though

Miramira Endevall says

I really struggled about what to rate this book. On the one hand, I agree with a portion of the author's premise. Christain "art" is terrible, full stop. OTOH, the author is an arrogant sonuvabitch. I literally gasped and laughed out loud in a crowded theatre at intermission, causing everyone around me to think I was a loony. But then, they already thought that because I was singing along when invited to do so, but I digres...

I'm going to send this book to my mother. That should give us something to talk about. ::wicked grin::

Richard Gray says

The first book I read which influenced my worldview.

NC says

Addicted to Mediocrity's main premises revolve around the banality of modern Christian arts which seem to follow man-made values and evidently neglect the inherent purposes of art appreciation and creativity God has blessed us with. The author starts off with pointing our the importance of arts in relation to the nature of God's creation; being created in an image of God, we human are naturally granted with great qualities as he says:

""made in the image of God," it is the area of creativity, the capacity to enjoy beauty, to communicate artistically and through abstract ideas. The area of creativity therefore is no minor footnote to the Christian life, but is an essential." (p.12)

Knowing this truth, we as Christians are supposed to pay more attention to arts and do not let the values of the world and its shallowness hinder us from another great path of glorifying God. The first part of the book is really clear about these points. The author does an excellent job to motivate us audiences to embrace arts as it is again with his way of writing. Highly critical statements are used to effectively portray the ideas. The illustrations are also great to help visualize and emphasize the concepts; for example, when the author talks about how awfully we have ruined the true beauty of arts, putting our creativity to death by conforming to capitalism and ideologies; he puts the illustration of representations of arts; paint brush, musical instrument, a ballet shoe hanged on a gallows. I found them really helpful and really excited to see another illustration await for me on the next page. It is really refreshing and inspiring.

However, the book also contains a lot of flaws as I read on. Though the ideas are well communicated, there is one thing I really want to search for in the book; more biblical supports. There is a small use of the Bible in this book except for Genesis which the author uses to point out the beauty of creation. The other parts are mainly his claims and quotes excerpted from other books; they make me feel kind of uneasy to trust those strong suggestions and challenges without the firm foundation of the Bible despite the fact that I do like those wild ideas, I still expect more evidences and responsibilities in his words. And in many parts he is so judgmental; He goes further to judge modern church practices; well what he claims is true to a certain degree but how can he judge the unseen. He says that attending church activities can be a waste of time as he says:

"It might be a good idea to abandon our frenetic addiction to church activities altogether in favor of more warm and personal human relationships, which are natural and God-given, within the family and in friendships. After all, for a Christian married couple, making love is as spiritual as some church activity. Isaac took Rebekah to his mother's tent, not to some prayer meeting or spiritual emphasis week. God in Scripture has left the church for us as an institution to serve a very real and worthwhile purpose. However, the constant activity-oriented nature of the church today, which is more like some combination health club-golfing society-bowling tournament-Sunday school service-inspirational message-fellowship-Jesus advertising machine-growth program all rolled into one, does not seem to have very much to do with the institution we read about in the New Testament." (P.87)

and he also says:

"There are no valid excuses for accepting this mediocrity. The excuse that "sometimes people are saved" is no excuse at all. People have been saved in concentration camps because God can bring good from evil, but this does not justify the evil. The idea that "the Spirit can work somehow," that God can bring something out of it if we just sort of throw it out there, is unjustifiable from those who claim to know the living God and can see his integrity and dedication to quality in his Word and the world around us. The excuse that "many people see this," and that "somehow it must do some good" and "it's better than nothing" is no excuse." (p.45)

Whoa whoa easy it is true that overspent time attending church activities can harm your life in many areas, yet there exist also people who have time to do them effectively and are blessed by these activities. Though they might look to adhere to mediocrity of the world, it is also evident that God has actually turned some of those into blessings to people as well. It's not that we try to choose for the second best sometimes people just don't know and even if they know and are willing to achieve the real God-given things we might have to understand that at some point our creativity now has a basis on this so called mediocrity as well; we are in this culture and culture is inevitable. Culture is inescapable no matter how hard we try to get the out of it. For example, this book, though, claiming itself to be out of the bubble and independent from mediocrity. In a sense, yes it is true that it purposes unconventional and out of the box way of thinking but it also conforms to

mediocrity of capitalism; being published and printed by a publisher and mass produced by a machine and finally shelved in book stores all over the country to be consumed by the audiences. This mediocrity phenomena perhaps is just a double-edge sword as anything that has happened in the face of history; it can do good and huge destruction. The author also seems to praise people from the past in terms of artistic creation more than our existing culture of cliche and the bubble of capitalism; well though they created more authentic artworks and released more creativity than people of this age there are also mistakes of the era as well. The Catholic Church spent loads of money funding artists to create arts while many people in the society were struggle towards poverty. Would you say that the whole thing was entirely good? Absolutely not. The author just picks an aspect on creativity and forgets totally to look at the bigger picture; the reality in the society.

Maybe capitalism is more evil but there are evil everywhere as long as human still exist. We are sinful by nature, right? I do agree with the point that our culture is full of shallow manipulation and ridiculously banal Christian artworks. But, we have also have to be careful to take a look in individual scales. Remember what Jesus said, " Don't judge or you too will be judged" We can't know for sure what in people's heart is and I don't want this new attitude to fix what we have failed to backfire us by veiling our will and love to serve God. This is something that we all should be more careful. I didn't say that we should not fix anything just leave it as it is or whatever but it should be in a softer way and with great understanding both in the context of our culture and society, and ourselves. Furious judgmental criticism which cover all the people in its circle without concerning to their individual motives are impractical and almost equally evil to those twisted practices themselves.

In overall, this book is still a good read despite its flaws if you want to remind yourself of authenticity and the beauty God has put in our lives. If you're interested in arts in relation to God I would like to recommend it to see what the idea is. The book also suggests readings that will expand your view on this particular topic whether Giorgio Vasari's book and others useful resources to exercise your knowledge. I also suggest you to read it critically. Open your Bible along, take notes and don't be quick to believe every single thing being said here.

Hope this review is helpful

Rick says

Gave me some stuff to think about. Enjoyed it. Too bad he has pretty much abandoned the faith.

Joel Mitchell says

Franky Schaeffer lambastes the 20th century church's lack of regard for the arts and "addiction to mediocrity." He is fed up with the cheap baubles with verses slapped on them, the trite bumper stickers with vaguely Christian sayings, the posters that amount to little more than Christian graffiti, the "shallow" "redundant" "sloganeering" books/preaching, etc. that fill Christian bookstores, churches, and homes.

The basic argument of the books is:

- Creativity is an aspect of the image of God in man which should be exercised and encouraged.
- Beauty (as something created by God) should be appreciated whether the source or subject matter is overtly

Christian or not.

- The Christian life should not be compartmentalized into "spiritual" and "secular" activities; rather, every part of life should be to the glory of God (with this book focusing on excellence in the arts).

While I agree with Schaeffer up to a point, I think that in his zeal to promote quality in the arts among Christians (a worthy goal!) he takes his arguments too far and/or overstates his case. For example, he seems to make the unwarranted leap from the idea that all parts of a Christian's life are of value and should be to the glory of God (true according to I Corinthians 10:31) to the idea that all parts of the Christian life are of equal value/importance (contra e.g. Luke 10:38-42).

I also thought that Schaeffer comes across as mean-spirited, or even pompous at times. For example: "in [the arts]...the Christian community, the evangelical establishment, often exhibit to the world an I.Q. about thirty points lower than that of a rather demented jellyfish". Funny? Yes. Demonstrative of Christian love? Not so much. I do not think that he makes any non-disparaging remarks about the church in the entire book.

I agree with the aim of this book and some of its main points, but I think that it would have benefited from less venom and more Scriptural support.

Sean says

"Today, Christian endeavor in the arts is typified by the contents of your local Christian bookstore-accessories-paraphernalia shop. For the coffee table we have a set of praying hands made out of some sort of pressed muck. Christian posters are ready to adorn your walls with suitable Christian graffiti to sanctify them and make them a justifiable expense. Perhaps a little plastic cube with a mustard seed entombed within to boost your understanding of faith. And as if this were not enough, a toothbrush with a Bible verse stamped on its plastic handle. And a comb with a Christian slogan or two impressed on it. On a flimsy rack are stacked a pile of records. You may choose them at random blindfolded, for most of them will be the same idle rehash of acceptable spiritual slogans, endlessly recycled as pablum for the tone-deaf, television-softened brains of our present day Christians."

pg. 22-23

...Hilarious.

I found this book to be very encouraging in the freedom it gives Christians to pursue their artistic endeavors in their own special way, without being held back by suffocating "Christian" ideologies. It begins with an argument for many of the problems with the way the Evangelical American church has handled the arena of the arts and aesthetics, and then gives an alternative solution for how one could view the arts. All while taking refuge and inspiration from the history of Christian artists going back to the fall of the Roman Empire, heightening in the High Renaissance, and finally through the 19th Century.

Mark says

While I agree with the premise of this book, I personally found it to be an overlong read, despite its already short (127 pages) length. Once you reach agreement with the book's basic propositions, the rest seems

somewhat repetitive.

J.A.A. Purves says

Frank, or "Franky" Schaeffer is quite the interesting fellow. His very first book, *Addicted to Mediocrity: Contemporary Christians and the Arts*, explores and attacks the currently low view with which most, who hold to Christianity, still look upon the Arts. Written back in 1980, Schaeffer's criticisms of modern Christianity's interaction with the Arts are still legitimate today. Even some of the cartoons Kurt Mitchell illustrated for the book have proved weirdly prophetic (like one of a "Holy Land" amusement park which is now really being constructed in real life by "Ark Encounter LLC" and "Answers in Genesis."

Son of famous theologian, Francis Schaeffer, Frank had to have been given one hell of an education. Just imagination the nonstop conversations at the dinner table. While his father certainly understood some things that he didn't, it's also fair to say that, growing up as he did, he understood some things that his father didn't. After the publication of this book, Schaeffer gave both filmmaking a try (and failed badly) and further writing a try (successfully writing a number of satirical novels and other reasoned criticism of modern day evangelicalism). Some try and describe his writing as shrill or angry, but 30 years later, I can't help but find his writing ring more true, perhaps, than he even realized it would at the time.

Judge his writing for yourself:

"Today, Christian endeavor in the arts is typified by the contents of your local Christian bookstore-accessories-paraphernalia shop. For the coffee table we have a set of praying hands made out of some sort of pressed muck. Christian posters are ready to adorn your walls with suitable Christian graffiti to sanctify them and make them a justifiable expense. Perhaps a little plastic cube with a mustard seed entombed within to boost your understanding of faith. And as if this were not enough, a toothbrush with a Bible verse stamped on its plastic handle, and a comb with a Christian slogan or two impressed on it. On a flimsy rack are stacked a pile of records. You may choose them at random blindfolded, for most of them will be the same idle rehash of acceptable spiritual slogans, endlessly recycled as palabrum for the tone-deaf, television-softened brains of our present-day Christians.

The airwaves as you leave the shop are jammed with a choice avalanche of what can generally be summed up as rubbish, ready to clog your television and radio set with "Christian" programming. The publishing houses churn out (measured by the ton) a landslide of material which can scarcely be called books, often composed of the same themes which are viewed as spiritual, rehashed by writers who would be better employed in another trade.

In fact, without making the list endless, one could sum up by saying that the modern Christian world and what is known as evangelicalism is marked, in the area of the arts and cultural endeavor, by one outstanding feature, and that is its addiction to mediocrity." (pgs. 22-23) ...

<http://redemptiosehnsucht.blogspot.co...>

Dominique says

First, I LOVE Francis Schaeffer's books and worldview. I have yet to read anything I don't like by him. This has been on my to read list since college and I'm glad I finally read it.

I think it will be a book I read and re-read. There is much wisdom in this tiny little book.

Some of my favorite quotes were:

1. Art needs no justification.
2. Christians should add to integrity and quality in all areas of art.
3. Christ redeems our work (art).
4. (paraphrased) There is no need for slogans, propoganda, or Christianese in art. (Or in any other aspect of Church life that uses artistic ability).
5. Everything (art) is His (God's) whether the art is Christian or secular (paraphrase mine).

Basicall, Schaeffer once again argues that the Church needs to change its view of art (thus those who have the gift/call of art) dramatically. And not just 'christian' art, but any kind of art. He argues that in the end, all art is 'Christian' because all art comes from Him who is the greatest creator of all. Being an artist is as close as you can get to God in a sense because you are creating which is what God does/did.

One of the things Schaeffer repeatedly talks about is how Christians should be setting the standard of art - not mimicing the world's standards, nor, bending to the demands of the church structure on what they define 'art' to be or what they kind of art they even allow.

Artists need to create whatever it is that they 'see' and 'desire' to create.

My favorite part was Schaeffer's confirmation that being creative, being an artist is a gift from God and when the church or other Christians squelch that, change that, or filter that, that is not of God.

One of the comments Schaeffer makes that really had me nodding my head was that whatever we are called to do, be it acting, writing, being a businessman, THAT is are 'art' and we should do it with gusto, integrity, and high standards.

In addition, going to that job is living a Godly life which is a our Christian duty. We don't have to be in church teaching, singing,doing missions, or doing anything else to fulfill our call of being a Christian. The term is all encompassing and being at work is part of that. Be in the world... It is not fulfilling the traditional demands of the church that makes us Christ follower/Christians but it is our actions out in the midst of the world doing what we have been called to do and gifted to do. So, at home, at church, or at work are all part of our fulfilling our call; our purpose.

Excellent book! Highly recommend it.

Now off to find some more of his books to read.

Abigail says

True premise padded with biased ideology.

Nick says

I agree with a lot of Franky Schaeffer's points out in this book. Christian movies, by and large, are terrible. Christian novels are often poorly written, riddled with stock characters, and are peppered with forced moral/biblical(?) messages. Etc. etc.

However, I found myself increasingly frustrated by the fact that Mr. Schaeffer wasn't giving concrete examples. He spoke in broad generalizations and made blanket statements about what Christians should and shouldn't do. He also talked a lot about Christian art being inferior without giving readers any kind of rubric to judge artistic value. Many people will say that Christian music today is crap... OK, but why is it crap? This is what Mr. Schaeffer didn't do very well.

In the last half of his book he does offer some helpful answers to certain questions. One of those questions involves where to learn more about the subject, in which he recommends about 10 books. I guess you could say this book is a treatise that points readers towards deeper territory.

Jamie Gosney says

Everyone involved in the Christian music industry or anyone who happens to be a Christian and who is an artist of any nature, and has been frustrated by the utter mediocrity that Church puts forward as art or creativity, should read this book.

Damian Kinsella says

A good book, several strong statements that weren't as obvious at the time of writing.
