

# The Christian Imagination

## Thinking Christianly about the Arts

Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is commendable, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things. Phil 4:8

What is art?

Is it necessary?

How do we evaluate the “goodness” of art?

“...Christians of the historic Reformation will be wise if they understand art to be like clothes: a gift of the Lord to cover our nakedness, to dress our human life with joy, to strengthen and enrich our labors of praising God, serving the neighbor and caring for the world.” Calvin Seerveld in *Rainbows For a Fallen World* p. 242

“Now therein of all sciences is our poet the monarch. For he doth not only show the way, but giveth so sweet a prospect into the way, as will entice any man to enter into it.” Sir Philip Sidney, *The Defence of Poesy* (1554-1586)

Goal is to establish a framework for thinking about works of imagination - painting, poetry, movies, music, dance, stories, *etc.*

Two tendencies that aren't always helpful:

1. To think purely in moral/Biblical categories
2. To think only in artistic categories

We want to develop a whole-orbed way of thinking, and talking, about art that enriches our lives and allows us to engage with the world.

Next 5 weeks will comprise discussion about 3 areas to consider the arts, a week to tie it all together, and a week to take on some practical examples as a class.

It is helpful to think about art in terms of what is beautiful, true, and good about it.

**Beauty** - does the art attain artistic balance and creativity; does it lift the emotions; is it representative of what art should be

**Truth** - does it accurately represent eternal Truth and/or truth about the world (the world as it is/the world as it might be)

**Goodness** - does it engender a Biblical moral response, does it cause us to love God and his creation more

Thinking about art under these three headings allows us to provide a rounded critique/analysis of what we see. A piece of art may be well done but destructive to Truth or have a high truth content but little or no artistic value. It may be well-done and express truth about the world but stir up immoral emotions in us.

Learning to talk about art under these terms can open up new avenues for talking about artistic works and allow us to nourish our souls through works of art that might otherwise seem useless.

We need art to

Enhance our understanding of the beauty of the world

Create a longing for the perfection of the world to come

Develop our moral sensibilities

Stretch our ability to love our neighbors and understand their struggles and joys

Strengthen our love for God as the first and greatest Artist

Sonnet XIX

John Milton

WHEN I consider how my light is spent,  
Ere half my days in this dark world and wide,  
And that one talent which is death to hide  
Lodged with me useless, though my soul more bent  
To serve therewith my Maker, and present  
My true account, lest He returning chide,  
'Doth God exact day-labour, light denied?'  
I fondly ask. But patience, to prevent  
That murmur, soon replies, 'God doth not need  
Either man's work or his own gifts. Who best  
Bear his mild yoke, they serve him best. His state  
Is kingly: thousands at his bidding speed,  
And post o'er land and ocean without rest;  
They also serve who only stand and wait.'