

Art and the Artist Vocation A Biblical Doctrine of Creativity

The disciples come upon Jesus while He is praying, or perhaps, they know that He has been 'apart' praying by Himself, and so they ask Him, "Lord, teach us how to pray, just as John taught his disciples." It is encouraging to know that these disciples (the apostles!) clearly found prayer somewhat of a problem just as we do. They had the common sense and, more importantly, the humility to come to Jesus and to ask Him to teach them how to pray. In reply to their request Jesus teaches His disciples, and us, the Lord's Prayer. This prayer is both a prayer for us to pray, and also a pattern for our prayers, both public and private. Jesus assures us that our prayers should be short, simple, direct, confident and plain – yet we struggle to believe this, feeling that somehow prayer ought to be harder work than Jesus teaches. Why is there this disconnect between Jesus' teaching and our understanding of prayer?

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1. God, the Creator of all things, visible and invisible

- a). Perfection
- b). Diversity
- c). Profusion
- d). Inventiveness

2. No asceticism - rather the glad receiving and enjoyment of these gifts of God's creativity

Doctrines giving affirmation to the value of the richness of life here in this world

- a). Creation
- b). God's Providential Care
- c). The Incarnation
- d). Bodily Resurrection
- e). The New Creation

3. Man and woman, as God's image bearers, are made to be like him, as creators

Art needs no justification

- a). We are to seek to glorify God
- b). We find fulfillment
- c). We seek to be of benefit to others
- d). We exercise dominion over the earth.
- e). We are called now to set back the boundaries of the fall

4. The heart of the Christian's approach to creativity will be *Imitation*

Lewis on the call to imitation rather than originality

Similarities between a Christian and a Neo-Platonic view

Creativity will mean following after God's work of creation

Room for originality

All creative work will be a form of praise

5. The arts should not be simply an expression of the self

Since the Romantic Movement the arts have become sometimes simply self-expression

The Christian artist will not see himself or herself as the great revealer

"Great writing (and all great art) exists because there is a world not created by the writer."

The artist is a creature of God, using gifts given by God, to the glory of God, for the enrichment of the lives of others.

6. The creativity of others helps me to enter a little more into God's creativity

I am finite, and that is good, yet, there is God's world in all its' infinite variety, beauty, order and richness.

In this the arts are like love or moral action. One gives oneself to another, yet is never more fully oneself.

7. Art by Christians and by non-Christians

God has given his gifts to believer and unbeliever alike

The question, just as with a plane or a meal, is "Is this good?"

8. Arts and Crafts

Hans Rookmaaker on this subject

At one time the arts were all considered crafts

A change took place: art became ART

Results of this:

- a). Art became Museum art
- b). Art became very expensive
- c). The separation of ART from 'commercial art' or 'entertainment art'
- d). The alienation of most ordinary people from the arts
- e). Practical difficulties for the artist and art student
- f). Particular difficulty for Christians - "the arts are the epitome and very clear expression of the non-Christian Spirit of the age." This created a reaction and two problems
 - i. Art is unnecessary, unspiritual & worldly
 - ii. The Christian who perseveres and enters the arts has to face all sorts of criticisms

Our response will have to be:

- i. Art needs no justification. It is simply a gift of God, part of his created reality, to be received like any other gift with gratitude.
- ii. But, not art for art's sake.
- iii. The artist to regard oneself as a craftsman
- iv. Humility
I will not be an ARTIST

Great art exists when the artist values something more than himself, or herself.

B. Building a Christian Understanding of the Calling of the Artist

1. Are there Christian subjects for art? Is there any such thing as Christian art?

These expressions 'Christian subjects', 'Christian art' are often used. What could be meant by such expressions?

- a). Art for use in worship or devotion
- b). Art with 'Christian content'
- c). Art that is didactic
- d). Art by Christians
- e). We would do well simply to speak of Christian artists, or of Christians who are called to be artists

2. What will this mean for topics?

- a). There are no 'secular' topics
- b). There will be no room for sentimentality
- c). There should be the readiness to plainly say "My God and King!"

3. What about Representational Art? Is such art forbidden by the second commandment?

- a). In the visual arts?
- b). In literature?
- c). In drama?

4. How do we judge the arts? For the arts are not above judgment, nor is the artist.

- a). Is there giftedness from God?
- b). Dedicated development of the artist's gift.
- c). Commitment to the use of the artist's gift for others, and not only for the artist.
- d). Humble submission to the rules and traditions of each discipline, and also to God's created order.
- e). Is this work of art true? Is it in accord with reality?

All truly great art will appeal universally because of this element of truthfulness to the world as God made it and the world of our human existence.

- f). Moral criteria – what is the intention of the artist? Is it to deprave or corrupt? If there is immoral behavior or evil, what is the context?

What is the moral impact of reading or viewing this piece of work?

- g). Is there any continuity between the form and the content?
- h). Technical excellence
- i). Integrity of the artist
- j). Integrity of the work
- k). Simple entertainment is fine, for God created us to enjoy his gifts

Additional factors to take into consideration:

Elitism is inappropriate – people’s personal tastes must be respected.

Yet, it is essential not to give in to the ‘equalizing heresy’ for it is a form of relativism. There are standards for judging the arts.

The importance of recognizing the devotion of the heart – yet the need for ‘public’ standards

Artistic giftedness is not equivalent to human greatness or moral superiority.