

Christianity and Art: Movies, Music, and Literature

Recognizing and Rejecting the Superficiality of the Popular Christian Media–Morality

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Should Christians read secular fiction? Should Christians listen to secular music? Should Christians watch R-rated movies? These questions are hotly debated among American Evangelicals. In this paper, we will discover that the Biblical answer to all three is an emphatic "Yes!". In making this discovery, we will examine the issues foundational to Christian involvement and interaction with art. Firstly, we will develop a Christian understanding of personal stewardship and truth. Secondly, we will study two Biblical passages concerning the purity of a Christian's heart and mind. Thirdly, we will consider the current state of popular Christianity's interaction with movies, music, and literature, and outline some ideas of how this situation can be resolved, and fourthly, we will look at how special consideration is in order when children are concerned.

Please note this important point before we begin: excepting the section that explicitly concerns children, this paper focuses on Christian *adults*. So please bear in mind that issues of parenting will be raised after we have laid a biblical foundation for understanding Christian involvement in the arts.

Personal Stewardship and Truth

What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem? What concord is there
between the Academy and the Church? What between heretics and
Christians?
– Tertullian¹

Athens was the center of Greek culture, and Jerusalem was the birthplace of Christianity. Tertullian used them to draw a contrast between secular philosophy, which took place in the first, and the religion of faith in the man crucified in the second. Quoting Colossians 2:8², he concluded that "human wisdom which pretends to know the truth, while it only corrupts it"³ is to be shunned⁴. Since his time, historical, influential Christian leaders such as Gilbert Tennent, Bishop Francis Asbury, Billy Sunday⁵, and

1 <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/200Tertullian-pagan.html>, visited 12-8-01.

2 "Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ." Colossians 2:8. KJV on gospelcom.net.

3 <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/source/200Tertullian-pagan.html>, visited 12-9-01.

4 Ibid., visited 12-9-01.

5 Os Guinness quotes Billy Sunday as stating: "If I had a million dollars, I'd give \$999,999 to the

William Jennings Bryan⁶ have espoused similar ideas⁷. Well-intended though they may be, such teachings are actually a form of Gnosticism. As Arthur Holmes points out in his book The Idea of a Christian College, Gnosticism in general claims that "we are creatures of two worlds", one of which one is the source of good, while the other is the source of evil.⁸

One classic form of Gnosticism articulates those worlds as "matter and mind", arguing "that matter is the source of life's evils while mind is the source of what is rational and good, and that the two are locked in unending and unresolvable conflict"⁹. As Paul reminds us in 1 Timothy 4:5¹⁰, "everything God created is good". It is not biblical to create an artificial valuational distinction between mind and matter. Any such valuational distinctions are not inherent to creation as God made it, but are artificially introduced by humanity.

Unfortunately, the church is still haunted by another form of Gnosticism. In this case, the artificial valuational distinction being created is between the spiritual and the natural, or the "sacred" and the "secular".¹¹ This alternate form of Gnosticism places positive value on what is considered spiritual, or "sacred", and negative value on the natural, or "secular". According to Holmes,

This kind of Gnosticism keeps the Christian from cultural involvement, from artistic appreciation and creativity, from political and social action, and it generates a misdirected fear of science and philosophy and human learning. It produces needless tensions between faith and culture, a defensive attitude and sometimes even outright anti-intellectualism.¹²

Holmes proceeds to point out that the terms "natural", "secular", and "world" are ambiguous. What we consider "natural", such as intellectual curiosity and artistic powers and political concerns, is not what the New Testament means by "the natural man", and not everything in this world embodies the bad moral and religious connotations of the New Testament term "worldly". Despite the sinful nature of mankind, "this world is still God's creation, of value to both God and human beings. The 'secular' is not itself evil;

church and \$1 to education". Guinness, Os, Fit Bodies, Fat Minds: Why Evangelicals Don't Think and What to Do About It. (Baker Book House, 1994). p. 32.

6 "If we have to give up either religion or education, we should give up education." Guinness, p. 32.

7 Guinness, p. 29-32.

8 Holmes, Arthur F., The Idea of a Christian College. (William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1987), p. 14.

9 Ibid., p. 14.

10 Paul is refuting the idea that bodily things are to be avoided by Christians, concluding with the statement "For everything God created is good, and nothing is to be rejected if it is received with thanksgiving, because it is consecrated by the word of God and prayer." in 1 Tim. 4:4-5. (NIV on gospelcom.net) It is assumed that the word of God and prayer are constantly present in the lives of Christians; therefore all of God's creation is consecrated to us.

11 I used the word "secular" in the introduction to this paper because it carries a familiar meaning for the reader; but we will now see that for the rightly understanding Christian, "secular" carries but a faux-meaning.

12 Holmes, p. 14.

in fact, in God's world it too is sacred"¹³.

This contemporary form of Gnosticism pits matters of the heart (faith, hope, love) against matters of the mind (reason, knowledge, investigation), in stark contrast to what Jesus called the greatest commandment: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, *and with all thy mind*."¹⁴ Here Jesus commands Christians to love God equally and completely with heart, soul, *and mind*. Certainly then it is contrary to this greatest commandment to depreciate the activities of the human mind; in fact, what greater offering of the mind can be given but an unceasing investigation of God's creation? The more we come to know of the work of His hands, the more we are driven to admire and praise Him.

We ought to reject this sacred-spiritual-heart versus secular-natural-mind form of Gnosticism, just as we ought to reject all forms of Gnosticism. The heart and the mind play differing roles in the Christian life, but neither is to be exalted to the deprecation of the other. In the sense Tertullian was using the terms, Athens and Jerusalem not only have to do with each other, they are inseparable.

Holmes continues:

We are persons equipped by God with rational, moral, and artistic powers to invest for our Maker. We are sinners also, it is true, whose original image of God and personal powers are corrupted. But we are nonetheless the object of a divine grace that restores God's image and sanctifies human powers for God's glory. In other words, we have a God-given, God-preserved, God-restorable potential, a potential to be developed, disciplined, and invested in response to God.¹⁵

That Christians need to exercise their moral powers is not much debated.¹⁶ The fact that Christians need equally to exercise their rational and artistic powers continues to be contested, owing to the contemporary Gnostic ideology discussed above. What are we to do, now that we recognize the falsehood of valuational distinctions erected between mind and matter, or sacred and secular, or natural and spiritual? We recognize, as Holmes states, that we have potential, which we are responsible to develop, discipline, and invest – in *all* the areas of human personhood and culture. Remembering Jesus's parable of the talents¹⁷, we see the benefits of wise stewardship over the gifts the Father has entrusted to us, as well as the consequences of neglecting that stewardship.

Holmes lends two additional principles immediately relevant to us here:

13 Holmes, p. 15.

14 Matthew 22:37, KJV from www.gospelcom.net. Emphasis added.

15 Holmes, p. 15.

16 *How* Christians are to exercise their moral powers is certainly not a finalized issue, but at least Christians agree that moral agency is necessarily used.

17 Matthew 25:14–30, Luke 19:12–27.

1. All truth is God's truth, wherever it be found.
2. All truth is unified.¹⁸

I will quote Holmes's explication of the first of these principles:

If we confess that God is the all-wise Creator of all, then he has perfect knowledge of everything we ever sought to know or do. The truth about the physical order is known perfectly to him, the truth about humankind and society, and the truth about everything we ever wondered about in our most perplexed moments. The early church fathers summed this up in what has become a guidepost for Christian scholars ever since—*all truth is God's truth, wherever it be found.*¹⁹

The second principle follows from the first. A house divided against itself cannot stand²⁰, and Jesus of Nazareth is the incarnated Christ, the Creator and Lord of every thing. We add to this that all truth is His truth, and we recognize that all truth is part of one unified body of truth.

This understanding is the foundation for a Christian philosophy, which strives to relate all Truth into one coherent whole, centered on the fact of God's Creatorship and Lordship²¹. There is no room for differentiating between "truths of science" and "truths of religion", or "truths of the world" and "truths of the church". Such fragmented views are fundamentally inconsistent, but God is the Lord of all His creation, and He is rational and consistent.²² Therefore all of His creation will conform to His reason and consistency.

These two principles do not entail that everything theologians, philosophers, scientists, and others declare is true²³. They simply point out that whenever humans know Truth, that truth is part of a coherent whole that corresponds to reality,²⁴ which is entirely under the Lordship of Christ.

One important implication of these principles is that truth may be found in the midst of falsehood. Conversely, falsehood is often found in the midst of Truth. The Bereans scrutinized even the teachings of Paul and Silas²⁵, being careful not to accept anything that was inconsistent with what they knew to be true.²⁶ It is the Christian's responsibility

18 Holmes, p. 17.

19 Ibid.

20 Mark 3:25 "And if a house be divided against itself, that house cannot stand." KJV on gospelcom.net.

21 Holmes, p. 17.

22 This has been a topic of debate, of course. However, it should be acceptable to most Christians.

23 Holmes, p. 17.

24 This is assuming the Correspondence theory of truth, which states defines truth as "that which corresponds with reality". Most Christians probably agree with this.

25 Acts 17:11 "...they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so." KJV on gospelcom.net.

26 Please note here the important fact that *not all Truth is contained in the Bible*. There is Truth that is not in the Bible, including the trivial fact that I am wearing red and black checked pajama pants as I write this, and the important fact that DNA is in the shape of a double-helix. While we cannot search the scriptures to confirm such things, we can (and must!) check them for consistency with a Christian

to submit every idea to the test of consistency with a biblical (Christian) worldview, whether it comes from the local church's pulpit, Hollywood's pulpit, Nashville's pulpit, or a publisher's pulpit. Some (or all) of it will be true, and some (or all) of it will be false. In no case should Christians accept anything without scrutiny.

A second vitally important implication of these principles is that Christianity has nothing to fear from ideas. If Christ (the Living Word, or *Logos*) is the Lord of all truth, then the exploration of reason and Christian faith should ultimately lead to the same conclusions. I echo the words of Winfried Corduan on this topic: "I am convinced that faith and reason, if used properly, will arrive at the identical truth"^{27, 28} This does not ensure that this process is easy, or executed without error. But if Christianity is true, then it should be able to consider any idea and discern between its truth and its falsehood, either of which may be partial. The statement "Christians should not think about that" is incompatible with a properly developed Christian worldview.

A properly Christian understanding of truth is essential in every area of life, but the purpose here is to emphasize that art is like everything else; Christians need to be thinking about it, recognizing the truth in it, and discerning the falsehoods as well.

I will add to Holmes's two principles that *all beauty is God's beauty*²⁹. Once again, if we confess that God is the all-beautiful Creator of all, then we must confess that all created beauty must ultimately be derived from His beauty. The importance of this principle is that we have an objective standard for which to strive in artistic endeavors, and against which to measure the aesthetic qualities of our works. Some may object that this standard is unknowable and out of reach, and therefore worthless to us in this present life. On the contrary, 1 Corinthians 13:12 tells us that "For now we see through a glass, darkly; but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known."³⁰ It is the case, then, that

1. An objective standard (God) for beauty exists.
2. We can now know that objective standard in part, because "we see through a glass, darkly".
3. At some point (after Christ's return) we shall know that objective standard "face to face".

Both the scriptures and the created order communicate God's truth and beauty to us, and it is part of our task to explore and seek them both, looking for the day in which both will be fully revealed to us.

worldview, to which the scriptures are foundational.

27 Corduan, Winfried, No Doubt About It: The Case for Christianity. (Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1997). p. 21.

28 Often one's faith and reason conflict, showing that either faith or reason is being used improperly and needs correction. It is a good idea in such circumstances to consult other authoritative Christians (or their writings or teachings), to ask how they have resolved the issue in question. Every answer, of course, must pass the same test of consistency.

29 This principle was presented to me through an online discussion with Dan Buck.

30 KJV on gospelcom.net.

Holmes proceeds to counter the oft-held view that Christians are called to live somehow aculturally (outside of all cultures), in "Christlike purity":

At creation God made us in his own image, to steward our own and nature's resources creatively and wisely. Our cultural responsibilities originate here. Tensions occur between faith and culture, it is true, some of which are due to our inability to grasp relationships and see life's task as a whole, and others of which are due to the imperfections of particular cultures... But cultural responsibilities persist; they began with creation.³¹

The scriptures contain much heavily cultural content, including accounts of agriculture, art, and technology developed by people, as well as the "virtue of conscientious work, [and] the joys of song and love and friendship". The poetic books in the Old Testament exhibit culturally based artistic form. Furthermore, Christ was incarnated into the social, political, and religious structures of his time, and for thirty years He focused on "secular" tasks, with His family and their carpentry business. He proceeded to teach that all of life is a stewardship and sacred before God, and His apostles taught of the "Lordship of Christ in everything", and used cultural vehicles (including Greek philosophical concepts) to communicate the gospel³².

I cannot improve upon or effectively summarize the following:

We are cultural beings. God made us to be that way and there is no escape from cultural involvement and cultural tasks. Even a counterculture itself becomes a culture, or else it blends back into the culture it condemns. Occasionally a religious community tries to stand outside culture, but it develops into a subculture with its own cultural tasks.

Culture was ordained by God. The creation mandate to replenish and subdue and have dominion has never been rescinded... In response to the complaint that humankind has sinned and thereby failed culturally, the epistle to the Hebrews speaks of the redemptive work of Christ, later of those who did wide varieties of things "by faith" (Heb. 11), and of the believer's relationship to such cultural things as marriage and money and political authority (Heb. 13).

The point is that God's goodness as well as human sin affects culture...Fallen people, whether they want it or not and however distortedly, still image their Creator. The mathematical genius of an Einstein and the artistic creativity of a Picasso are God's gifts to human kind through common grace.

To confess God as Creator and Christ as Lord is thus to affirm his hand in all life and thought. It is to admit that every part of the created order is sacred, and that the Creator calls us to exhibit his wisdom and power both by exploring the creation and developing its resources and by bringing our own created abilities to fulfillment. For while all nature declares the glory of God, we human beings uniquely image the Creator in our created creativity...It is a call...to see every

31 Holmes, p. 19–20.

32 Holmes, p. 20.

area of thought and life in relation to the wisdom and will of God and to replenish the earth with the creativity of human art and science.³³

Christians must realize this cultural mandate given by God through the scriptures. Human creativity is a gift from God, as well as a fundamental part of what it means for humans to be made in God's image. It is something we must develop and enjoy for the purposes of glorifying and *reflecting the image of* the greatest Creator of all. Many Christians tend to focus on the Great Commission when considering our role in this world, and often we rightly remind ourselves of the maxim that "actions speak louder than words". Combining these ideas, we ought to realize that our actions shout to the world with the joy of our Saviour when we produce and treat with integrity and seriousness the most carefully wrought works of both divine and human creativity.

At this point, we have established the following:

- 1) Valuing one aspect of life radically over another (Gnosticism) is unbiblical, and a valuational dichotomy between the "sacred" and the "secular" is unacceptable as a part of a Christian's worldview.
- 2) Humans have rational, moral, and artistic (creative) powers, which Christians are commanded to invest in all areas of human undertaking, as faithful stewards.
- 3) All truth is God's truth and is unified, and all Christians need constantly to be evaluating all the ideas presented to them, distinguishing between those that are consistent with a Christian worldview and those that are not.
- 4) All beauty is God's beauty, and Christians must use the objective standard of the Creator in both the production and consumption of artistic works.
- 5) Christians have a God-given cultural mandate, part of which entails that Christians deal intentionally, seriously, and sincerely with the fields of artistic endeavour.

Purity of Heart and Mind

That Christians' hearts and minds are to be pure before God is made obvious in scripture.³⁴ What is less obvious (or at least more debated) is what it means to have pure hearts and minds. I am not attempting here to establish all of what having pure hearts and minds means, but I will show the unbiblical natures of two common ideas.

The first of these unbiblical ideas can be stated in this way: *Christian's hearts and minds become impure whenever they ponder impurity*. This view is often bolstered by a misunderstanding of the following verse:

³³ Holmes, p. 20–21.

³⁴ Matthew 5:8, 2 Cor. 6:6, 1 Tim. 1:5, 2 Tim. 2:22, Titus 1:15, and 1 Peter 1:22 are examples.

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.
 Philippians 4:8³⁵

I have heard Christians use this verse to minimize the set of topics about which they think. The verse is treated as a list of qualifications, and each topic is tested against each qualification, one by one, until it is either eliminated or accepted. This is a false application of this verse because it presumes to add a logical "and" between each element of the list. Thus the verse becomes:

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true and honest and just and pure and lovely and of good report and virtuous and praiseworthy, think on these things.
 Philippians 4:8, as commonly understood.

Failing on one point makes a topic unfit for a Christian's thoughts.

How might this understanding of Philippians 4:8 be applied? Consider the following topics for thought, as each is measured against this list of qualifications:

<i>Topic</i>	<i>Pass/Fail</i>	<i>Qualifications</i>
1. Judges 19:16–30	Passes: Fails:	true, honest just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, praiseworthy
2. Modern terrorism	Passes: Fails:	true honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, praiseworthy
3. Hell	Passes: Fails:	true, honest, just pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, praiseworthy
4. Sin	Passes: Fails:	true honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, praiseworthy

³⁵ KJV, on gospelcom.net.

<i>Topic</i>	<i>Pass/Fail</i>	<i>Qualifications</i>
5. School violence	Passes: Fails:	true honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report, virtuous, praiseworthy

All five of these topics are clearly things about which Christians need to think; we cannot simply ignore passages of scripture³⁶, terrorism, the doctrine of hell, the doctrine of sin, and the escalation of school violence. A moment of careful thinking will reveal many other topics rightly demanding our attention, while failing one or more of the qualifications in this incorrectly understood version of Philippians 4:8.

We see now that assuming an implicit "and" between each of the listed qualifications in Philippians 4:8 leads to unreasonable conclusions. I argue that the verse is correctly understood when the "ands" from above are replaced with "ors", creating the following run-on version of the verse:

Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true or honest or just or pure or lovely or of good report or virtuous or praiseworthy, think on these things.

Philippians 4:8, rephrased for clarification.

A visual re-structuring of the original translation can help the implied "ors" to become apparent:

Finally, brethren, 1. whatsoever things are true, 2. whatsoever things are honest, 3. whatsoever things are just, 4. whatsoever things are pure, 5. whatsoever things are lovely, 6. whatsoever things are of good report; 7. if there be any virtue, and 8. if there be any praise, think on these things. Philippians 4:8, KJV ³⁷	Finally, brothers, 1. whatever is true, 2. whatever is noble, 3. whatever is right, 4. whatever is pure, 5. whatever is lovely, 6. whatever is admirable -- 7. if anything is excellent or 8. praiseworthy -- think about such things. Philippians 4:8, NIV ³⁸
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We see now eight different classes of things about which to think.³⁹ Philippians 4:8

36 Many passages other than Judges 19:16–30 fail to meet the qualifications of pure, lovely, virtuous, and praiseworthy. How many can you name?

37 Quoted from gospelcom.net.

38 Ibid.

39 The "and" in "if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise" may be confusing. The placement of

is not about excluding topics from the minds of Christians, it is about opening the door for Christians to deal seriously with every important topic. Christians should not close their minds; on the contrary, their minds should be open and deal with integrity in every area of thought.

Thus scripture commands us at times to ponder topics that are untrue, dishonest, unjust, impure, unlovely, or of a bad report, because if a topic meets one of the qualifications of Philippians 4:8, then Christians are commanded to "think on" it. I believe that there is no topic that falls outside of the scope of Philippians 4:8; there is no topic that always fails to meet any of the criteria. The most thorough analysis of any idea is never *in itself* a sin.

Christians as a body have been commanded to think about every topic, but is there any time when an individual Christian should not ponder something? Jesus shows us the answer to this question in the seventh chapter of Mark:

1 Then came together unto him the Pharisees, and certain of the scribes, which came from Jerusalem.
2 And when they saw some of his disciples eat bread with defiled, that is to say, with unwashen, hands, they found fault.
3 For the Pharisees, and all the Jews, except they wash their hands oft, eat not, holding the tradition of the elders...
5 Then the Pharisees and scribes asked him, Why walk not thy disciples according to the tradition of the elders, but eat bread with unwashen hands?
6 He answered and said unto them, Well hath Esaias prophesied of you hypocrites, as it is written, This people honoureth me with their lips, but their heart is far from me.
7 Howbeit in vain do they worship me, teaching for doctrines the commandments of men.
8 For laying aside the commandment of God, ye hold the tradition of men, as the washing of pots and cups: and many other such like things ye do...
14 And when he had called all the people unto him, he said unto them, Hearken unto me every one of you, and understand:
15 There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him: but the things which come out of him, those are they that defile the man.
16 If any man have ears to hear, let him hear.
17 And when he was entered into the house from the people, his disciples asked him concerning the parable.
18 And he saith unto them, Are ye so without understanding also? Do ye not perceive, that whatsoever thing from without entereth into the man, it cannot defile him;
19 Because it entereth not into his heart, but into the belly, and goeth out into the draught, purging all meats?
20 And he said, That which cometh out of the man, that defileth the man.

the "and" between two "if" clauses, however, shows that things from both categories should be included: "if something is virtuous, think about it, and if something is praiseworthy, think about it." The NIV is slightly clearer in this regard, stating: "if anything is excellent or praiseworthy".

21 For from within, out of the heart of men, proceed evil thoughts,
adulteries, fornications, murders,
22 Thefts, covetousness, wickedness, deceit, lasciviousness, and evil
eye, blasphemy, pride, foolishness:
23 All these evil things come from within, and defile the man.
Mark 7:1–3, 5–8, 14–23⁴⁰

In this passage Christ explains that we are defiled only by the evil things that come from within us, and not by the evil things we may intake from the world around us. This brings us to our second commonly held but unbiblical idea concerning Christian purity: *Christians' hearts and minds become impure whenever they observe impurity*. Such observation could presumably be through any of the five senses, and the observed impurity could be in the form of blasphemy, disobedience, cursing, witchcraft, or almost any other untruth or sin. This idea can be detected in the language commonly used by Christians who avoid certain music, movies, or books in order to "keep their hearts pure".

*"There is nothing from without a man, that entering into him can defile him."*⁴¹ It could not be plainer; Christ taught that nothing a Christian can intake (or "observe") can defile him or her. Nevertheless, caution is always in order, because ideas intaken through observation frequently do tempt one to make sinful decisions. In other words, although the act of observing an evil thing never *in itself* makes a Christian impure, many things we can observe may *cause* subsequent evil things to come from *within* us. This is why Christ distinguished between things that enter the heart and things that do not; "entering into the heart" here implies that evil things subsequently come from *within* the heart. So it is never biblical to say "Christians shouldn't think about topic X or observe topic Y", but it is biblical to realize that "I have a weakness, and to avoid sin I shouldn't dwell on topic X at this point in my life".

This greatly affects how Christians interact with art, for it forces us to realize that it is unbiblical to generalize which artistic works are "acceptable" for consumption by Christians.

For example: the mere observation (or pondering) of nudity is not a sin, but such observation frequently leads to the sin of lust. A Christian who knows he or she is susceptible to lust may need to avoid watching certain movie scenes, or watch them in such a context that lust can be avoided another way (perhaps by the presence of a spouse or group of friends). Every Christian must be aware of his or her weaknesses, and strive to avoid the circumstances that lead to irresistible temptation.

Note that although we have established that observation of sin⁴² is not in itself sinful,

40 KJV, from gospelcom.net.

41 Some may raise an objection at this point, arguing that Christ was referring only to dietary issues when He made this statement. Yes, the preceding context is of dietary concerns, but verses 14–23 clearly demonstrate the scope of His teaching in this passage.

42 I do not distinguish in this paper between the observation of *actual* sin and the observation of the *image* (or appearance) of sin, such as in a film, song, or novel.

we have not established that the observation of sin is, in itself, valuable. In fact, that is clearly not the case. There is no positive value inherent in the act of observing sin. But if sin is observed in the process of performing another act, that other act may justify or even necessitate enduring the observation of sin.⁴³

And it came to pass, as Jesus sat at meat in the house, behold, many publicans and sinners came and sat down with him and his disciples. And when the Pharisees saw it, they said unto his disciples, Why eateth your Master with publicans and sinners? But when Jesus heard that, he said unto them, They that be whole need not a physician, but they that are sick.

Matthew 9:10–12⁴⁴

In this passage we see that Jesus was driven to associate with sinners for the purpose of, among other things, establishing relationships with them. Undoubtedly he observed sinful behavior as he surrounded himself with the "scum of society", but those observations (and other less-than-desirable aspects of keeping such company) were justified -- indeed, necessitated -- by the many much more important issues at stake, such as the relationships He was establishing and the example He was setting.

It is unavoidable that consuming more than a select few movies, songs, and books leads to the observation and pondering of multitudinous sins, untruths, and even blasphemies. Is the consumption of such artistic works justifiable within a Christian worldview?

I submit that there are four primary actions Christians should perform that justify the observation of sin in the context of art consumption and criticism.⁴⁵

By consuming and criticizing (thinking seriously and interpretively about) artistic works, we

1. demonstrate that all aspects of life and human culture are valued by God and His people.
2. exercise developmental stewardship over the creativity and reason God has given us, as we are commanded to do in scripture.
3. exercise our ability to discern between truth and falsehood, as well as continue in the work of developing a complete Christian worldview demonstrating the unity of truth under the Lordship of Christ.
4. glorify God for the fruit of the common grace with which He blesses artists, Christian and non-Christian alike.

Delighting in sin itself is certainly unbiblical, but delighting in the creativity, truth,

43 It is not my purpose to prove so here, but *producing* the appearance of sin in the process of performing another act may be justified on occasion as well, such as when creating an artistic work.

44 KJV from gospelcom.net.

45 In this paper I use "criticize" to mean "think seriously and interpretively" about a subject.

and beauty that can be communicated in the midst of and even through sin is not only permissible, it is imperative for Christians who are commanded to glorify God for all His works — including the ones performed through non-Christians.

We have now investigated and refuted two false ideas concerning Christian purity. We recognize that no area is biblically outside the realm of Christian thought, and that nothing we intake from the world is inherently sinful, because sin is a result of the condition of one's heart and not the sights, sounds, smells, feelings, or tastes one observes (or intakes). These realizations open the door for true Christian understanding, consumption, and criticism of art.

Unfortunately, many Christians have not realized the biblical truths discussed in this paper, and the current state of Christian understanding, consumption, and criticism of art is far from biblical. We will now mention some symptoms of this problem and examine a few ways in which Christians can begin to deal with it.

Popular Christian Interaction with Art

The top three considerations with which many Christians evaluate movies are nudity/sex, profanity, and violence. Not only is this evidence that many Christians assume the unbiblical views of purity refuted above, but this is evidence that they profoundly misunderstand cinematic art. As a result, they are unable to evaluate artistic content in films, and likewise with books and music. This is the essence of what I call "superficial-moral evaluation"; when we are so preoccupied with the immorality portrayed on a movie screen that we are entirely unable to see what that portrayal *means*, we have become shallow and unbiblical in our thinking. The most direct way to alleviate this problem is for Christians individually and collectively to seek out and develop an understanding of art and art criticism.

It is not within the scope of this paper (or my abilities) to convey anything approaching a complete methodology for art consumption and criticism. Instead, I will establish a simplified framework for each, and I will share in general terms some elements of movies, music, and literature on which Christians should focus as an alternative to the obvious, superficial-moral aspects of those works.

We will ask ourselves four questions as we develop this framework of art consumption:

1. What is one defining characteristic common to most art?
2. What should be our "goal" when we consume art?
3. How should we consume art?
(How do we reach our goal?)
4. What should be our focus as we consume art?

In answer to the first question, it is reasonable to expect a work of art to heighten the

observer's awareness of some subject matter. A work of art is *about something*, even if that something may be that the work is trying not to be about anything. (In other words, even when an artist tries to produce art that is not about anything, in some sense the meaninglessness of the work is its subject matter.)

It is therefore reasonable to approach a work of art with the goal of apprehending this heightened awareness. This is not an easily measured goal; it is not like a race because we can never truly "finish" in our awareness of something. The most timeless works of art are timeless precisely because they never cease to make an impression in their observers.

In order to obtain this heightened awareness, an observer must participate with and analyze a work. By *participating* I refer to associating ourselves deeply with a work, to the degree that our thoughts become inspired by the work itself. In the midst of participation, we *think from* the work, because we have internalized it. When doing analysis, we *think at* it, considering it externally to ourselves⁴⁶.

Lastly, analyzing a work in terms of its fundamental elements can reveal how the work speaks to its observers, and lend even more insight into the subject matter. In order to do this, we must identify some of the fundamental elements of cinematic, musical, and literary art.

Elements of Cinematic Art⁴⁷

1. Cinematography (how the camera is used)
2. Narrative Structure (how the story is told)
3. Mis en Scène (French for "what is in the scene")
4. Editing (how the movie is constructed from raw footage)
5. Sound (everything you hear)

When watching a movie it should be our purpose to discover, through our participation with the film, how such elements as these work together to heighten our awareness of some subject matter. Frequently Christians evaluate films exclusively with the following considerations:

- i. inclusion or exclusion of explicit material
(especially pertaining to violence, sex, or profanity)
- ii. praise or condemnation of non-Christian viewpoints
- iii. depiction of blasphemous or sinful behavior.

This sincere but flawed approach to film criticism mortally wounds Christians' abilities

46 Martin, F. David & Jacobus, Lee A., *The Humanities Through the Arts*. (McGraw-Hill, 5th Ed., 1997). p. 19–45. These ideas have been slightly modified from those in the original text.

47 These elements taken from class materials from *Arts and Ideas*, taught at Taylor University by Dr. Rachel Smith. (Spring, 2001)

to perceive or deal with the subject matter of films. In other words, such shallow evaluation guarantees the evaluator has missed the point of the movie.

Elements of Music⁴⁸

1. tone (a sound dominated by one frequency)
2. timbre (tone color from different instruments)
3. dissonance/consonance (displeasing/pleasing sound resulting from two or more simultaneous tones)
4. rhythm (pattern of temporal relationships of organized sounds)
5. tempo (speed at which a composition is played)
6. melody (group of notes played sequentially and having a perceivable shape)
7. harmony (simultaneous tones)
8. dynamics (modulation of volume)

When listening to music we should learn to become aware through participation with the piece of how the above elements (and others not listed here) paint a unified picture that interprets some subject matter. Popular Christianity frequently evaluates music exclusively with the following criteria:

- i. presence or absence of certain instruments
- ii. style of the piece
- iii. presence or absence of explicitly violent, sexual, or profane lyrics
- iv. presence or absence of lyrics expressing a non-Christian worldview

Unfortunately, stifling our interaction with a piece at such a superficial level ensures that we will fail to gain the heightened awareness of the piece's subject matter.

Elements of Literary Art

1. narrative structure (how is the story told)⁴⁹
2. diction (word choices)⁵⁰
3. literary devices (simile/metaphor, idiom, allegory)

When reading literature, we should learn to participate with the writing in such a way that we perceive the elements of literary art utilized within the work harmonizing with one another. We should see them complementing and completing one another as they are unified about the subject of the work. In contrast, popular Christianity tends to evaluate literature with only the following concerns in mind:

- i. inclusion or exclusion of explicit material

48 Ibid.

49 Martin, F. David and Jacobus, Lee A. p. 197.

50 Ibid. p. 219.

- (especially pertaining to violence, sex, or profanity)
- ii. praise or condemnation of non-Christian viewpoints
 - iii. portrayal of sinful thoughts, attitudes, or actions.

Once again, if Christians fail to deal with literary art on a deeper level than these criteria allow, we render ourselves incapable of perceiving or dealing with the actual subject matter of the work.

We now have answers to the questions with which we began this section:

1. We can expect a work of art to heighten our awareness of some subject matter.
2. Our goal in consuming art should be to apprehend this heightened awareness.
3. We should aim to apprehend this awareness through participation and analysis of an artistic work.
4. We should analyze the work in terms of its fundamental elements.

This brings us to our next framework, which concerns art criticism. To develop this framework we will ask three questions of every work of art:

1. What was the artist's intent?
2. Was that intention effectively realized?
3. Was that intention worth having?

Using the framework for art consumption outlined above, we should be able to answer questions 1 and 2. Question 3 largely concerns whether the work in question intends to explore significant truth. For example, if a novel seriously attempts only to explore the intrinsically romantic nature of carbonated beverages, we may justifiably state that the intention is of little worth. If, on the other hand, a novel explores the nature of humor by farcically exaggerating the properties of carbonated beverages, the intention may fail⁵¹, but it is probably worth having.

With some discernment, it is reasonable to state that most works that effectively realize the intentions of their authors are worth consumption. Few serious artists have intentions banal enough to fail on question 3.

Christians, like everyone, ought not to reject artistic works because of their superficial moral qualities. We ought to reject artistic works if they are poorly done. When Christians refer to "good" or "bad" art, they should be referring to the quality and not the superficial-moral content.

This brief glance at some of the elements of filmic, musical, and literary art provides a focal point for our efforts to embrace a God-centered, holistic view of film, music, and literature consumption and criticism. These frameworks describe a biblical alternative to superficial-moral evaluation of art, which can only yield superficially meaningful

51 I would expect that particular intention to fail – can you tell that I am not a novelist?

criticism. If we judge a work of art solely on the basis of whether or not it superficially offends us or our faith, we prevent our own awareness of the real content of the work, and we are thus entirely ignorant about whether or not the work is truly offensive. Once we have evaluated an artistic work through participation with it and analysis of its elements, and we find that it truly is offensive to the Gospel, it is our responsibility as stewards of creativity and bearers of the Truth to praise and appreciate the artist for his or her artistry, constructively criticize the work for the offenses it carries, and bring to light any truth in the work, as well as the truth illuminated by its contrast with the work.

Concerning Children

As I stated at the beginning of this paper, the arguments leading to this point are not intended to apply equally to both adults and children. In this section we will explore some ways in which children are different from adults, and we will consider the implications of those differences by briefly examining specific examples of cinematic and literary art. We will conclude by discussing what Christian parents ought to do because of these differences.

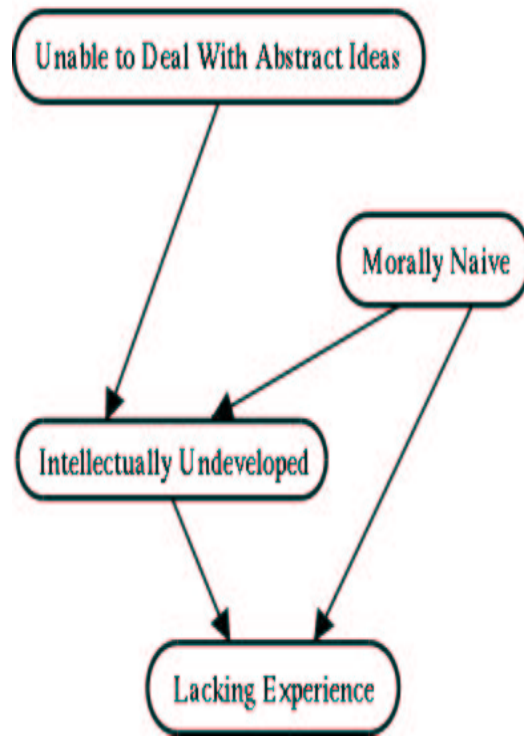
I am not a child psychologist, and "differences between children and adults" is a broad category. But I believe we can simplify our list of differences to four relevant, interrelated, and interdependent generalizations that require us to make special considerations for children in the areas of art consumption and criticism.

Four Differences Between Children and Adults

1. Children are less able to deal with abstract ideas.
2. Children are morally unaware and naive by comparison.
3. Children are intellectually undeveloped by comparison.
4. Children are inexperienced by comparison.

These four differences are dependent upon one another, in the sense that a child cannot progress in some of the areas without making progress in other, more fundamental areas. The following diagram illustrates the dependency relationships of these differences.

Dependency Diagram of Differences Between Children and Adults



According to the diagram:

1. A child's ability to deal with abstract ideas depends on his or her intellectual development.
2. A child's moral reasoning skills and awareness depend on his or her intellectual development and his or her life experiences.
3. A child's intellectual development comes about only through the course of life experiences.
4. Fundamentally, the difference between a child and an adult is a relative lack of life experiences.

Before we proceed, we should acknowledge the fact that I am not carefully defining which individuals we should consider "children" and which we should consider "adults". I believe the differences we are now considering amorphously categorize individuals for us. This is sufficient for our immediate purposes, because the boundary between childhood and adulthood is amorphous, especially through the later teen years. Parents, on a child-by-child basis, should make the judgment calls that must be made about the appropriateness of particular movies, music, and books. I believe that any further definition I could attempt to provide here would be unhelpful.⁵²

⁵² My chart is meant to refer generally to a "normal" child. Individuals who have problems that prevent normal development obviously fall outside my generalizations and the relationships I identify

The first of the four differences we have identified is that *children are unable to deal with abstract ideas*; they are exclusively concrete thinkers. They tend to think of what they see in front of them at the moment, and they do not relate different ideas together. Thus they are incapable of fully comprehending such a holistic Christian worldview as we have been exploring. Furthermore, they are unable to think critically with depth; the superficial–moral criticism we rejected above is the only type of criticism that children can perform.

Donna Gustafson, a reviewer for www.gradingthemovies.com, asserts that the 2001 movie *Moulin Rouge!* "oftimes glamorizes prostitution"⁵³. While this may be true from a child's perspective, an adult should recognize that *Moulin Rouge!*⁵⁴ portrays prostitution as an aspect of the cage that has trapped one of the main characters in the "underworld", which is symbolic of death itself. The "glamour" the movie associates with prostitution is part of portraying the two–faced nature of all sin: "For the lips of an adulteress drip honey...but in the end she is bitter as gall."⁵⁵ A child will be quick to identify the glamour, but slow to grasp the metaphor.

The second of our four differences is that *a child is morally unaware and naive*. A child is not capable of comprehending and analyzing complex moral situations. As a result, children often see only part of the entire picture and draw incorrect conclusions. The Harry Potter series is morally complex; as evidence consider how Richard Abanes and Alan Jacobs explicate two different analyses of the morality of Harry and his friends:

Richard Abanes writes in his book [Harry Potter and the Bible](#) that

...the morality presented in Rowling's works has little to do with biblical standards of honesty, integrity, and justice...Rowling does not employ the biblical definitions of 'evil' or 'good.' She has both sides...resorting to a similar philosophy for discerning right from wrong (subjectivism).⁵⁶

On the other hand, Alan Jacobs of Wheaton College writes the following for the journal *First Things*:

It is true that Harry is often at odds with some of his teachers, but these particular teachers are not exactly admirable figures: they themselves are often at odds with the wise, benevolent, and powerful Headmaster, Albus Dumbledore, whom they sometimes attempt to undermine or outflank. But to Dumbledore, significantly, Harry is unswervingly faithful and obedient; indeed, the climax of the second

between the four fundamental differences may be very different for such individuals.

53 http://www.gradingthemovies.com/html/mv/gtm_mv00632.shtml, visited 3/13/02. To its credit, this site includes a "Talk about the movie with your family..." section with each review.

54 The MPAA rated *Moulin Rouge!* PG–13 for sexual content. As I write this example, I am considering "child" to refer to early teens.

55 Proverbs 5:3a,4a, NIV from gospelcom.net.

56 Excerpted at <http://www.abanes.com/Potter6.html>, visited 3/13/02.

novel, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, turns on Harry's fidelity to Dumbledore.

Moreover, Harry's tendency to bypass or simply flout the rules is a matter of moral concern for him: he wonders and worries about the self-justifications he offers, and often doubts not just his abilities but his virtue. He is constantly aware that his great unchosen antagonist, Voldemort—the Dark Lord, the most evil of wizards and, after Dumbledore, the most powerful—offers temptations to which he cannot simply assume that he is immune. And when Dumbledore mentions Harry's "certain disregard for rules" he does so in a way that links such disregard with the forces of evil, thus warning Harry (though his larger purpose in that scene is to encourage the troubled young wizard).

In short, Rowling's moral compass throughout the three novels is sound—indeed, I would say, acute.⁵⁷

Abanes concludes that because the characters in the Harry Potter series do not clearly exemplify biblical morality, their decisions must be based on moral subjectivism. Indeed, on the surface that might appear to be true. Dumbledore, rightly identified by Jacobs as the arbiter of moral standards in the first [four] books, does not explicitly appeal to any sort of transcendent moral standard. What this reveals is not necessarily that evil and good are entirely subjective, but perhaps that Dumbledore actually *is* the moral standard in the imaginary world Rowling has articulated. Obviously neither analysis reveals a foundation of Christian morality, and both require careful observation and serious reflection that children cannot perform.

We now arrive at the third of our differences: *a child is intellectually undeveloped*. Understanding art involves analysis on some level, and children have not yet developed the critical thinking skills necessary to perform artistic analysis. *The Silence of the Lambs* is a very frightening film. It includes images of gore, squeaky doors, dark rooms, people trapped in pits awaiting their deaths, and two serial killers, among other fear-inducing things. It uses all these images and associations to create situations of incredible tension. An adult can watch *The Silence of the Lambs* and analyze it for the ways in which it scares its audience, and appreciate it for how well it explores the subject of human fear. A child is unable to analyze the film on that level.

Our last noted difference is that *children are inexperienced*. A child has not experienced as much education, as much culture, or as many life situations as an adult, and his or her ability to understand artistic works suffers as a result. We identified "participation" as one of the steps in our simplified system of art criticism. Participation with a work of art is experiential, and experiences build on one another. A child's participation with a work of art is superficial at best, because the experience of that participation stands alone. An adult participates with a work of art and undergoes the experience in the context of all his or her other life experiences, subconsciously comparing and contrasting, and (hopefully) obtaining the heightened awareness

⁵⁷ <http://www.firstthings.com/ftissues/ft0001/reviews/jacobs.html>, visited 3/13/02.

communicated by the artist.

Let us take a second look at each of our examples and consider this fundamental difference.

Firstly, *Moulin Rouge!* is fundamentally referential. A child, lacking sufficient experience in education and culture, will not recognize the references to the myth of Orpheus and Eurydice, the play *Cyrano de Bergerac*, the Bohemian Revolution, *Camille*, or *La Dame aux camelias*.⁵⁸ While *Moulin Rouge!* paints a self-contained picture that does not require the viewer to recognize its references, a viewer who does so is able to plumb the film's depth much more readily. However, regardless of how well a viewer recognizes or understands the references made by *Moulin Rouge!*, grasping the metaphor at the center of the plot absolutely requires abstract thought on the part of the viewer. Children only develop the ability to do such abstract thinking over time, by the accumulation of educational and general life experiences. *Moulin Rouge!*, as a work of art, will be largely lost on children because the moral decadence portrayed by the film will stand alone in their eyes, and not as part of Satine's redemption, or the underlying metaphor in general.

Secondly, the morality of Harry Potter and his friends does not appear to conform to the Judeo-Christian ethical standard. Young readers who lack experience in life situations will be slow to recognize either the deeper moral issues in the stories, or the evidence of the characters' subconscious moral reasoning. Even if these deeper moral issues and moral reasonings were observed by a child, the ability to analyze them collectively can come only through education and practice.

Furthermore, due to their lack of experience, children have a difficult time distinguishing between what is imaginary and what is real. A child who reads Harry Potter could possibly come away from the book believing, on some level, in the magic of Harry's world.

Thirdly, *The Silence of the Lambs* contains material designed to invoke human fear. The experience of viewing this film simply too strong for children, who have not undergone the "numbing" number and intensity of life experiences adults have. Even if a child did have the intellectual ability to appreciate the film on an analytical level, he or she would be so overcome by the strength of the material that analytical appreciation would be at least overshadowed, if not nullified.

What does all of this mean for parents? A parent's goal should be to raise his or her children to be biblically holistic Christians who (among other things) exercise full stewardship over their God-given creative abilities and participate redemptively in culture. Teaching children the scriptural basis for involvement in the arts is fundamental, and carefully demonstrating Christian involvement in the arts builds on that foundation.

Parents should gauge each child's level of development and share with him or her

⁵⁸ In fact, many adults might not even catch all these references...the last two I am drawing from Douglas Jones's article at <http://www.christianitytoday.com/bc/2002/002/7.15.html>, visited 3-27-02.

the consumption of artistic works within the child's grasp. I will reiterate — *this experience should be shared*. Parents ought to model Christian involvement in the arts *in concert* with their children. When such an experience is shared, doors are opened wide for discussion that will challenge and (through parental guidance) fortify children's beliefs, knowledge, abilities, and aesthetic and moral awareness. Not only are these things fortified, but the fortification comes as a result of sharing careful, guided reflection instead of (in the child's eyes) delivering foundationless assertions. In other words, instead of simply feeding a child conclusions, this process of parentally-shared involvement in the arts can prepare a child to develop his or her own conclusions. We have identified the fundamental difference between children and adults as a relative lack of life experiences. Certainly sharing the experiences of artistic works within a guided context brings life experiences; with parental guidance, art can make a tremendous positive difference in a child's development.

Consider the example of the Harry Potter series. A child who reads the Harry Potter books will probably observe Harry's and his friends' tendencies "to bypass or simply flout the rules", and because Harry and his friends are the heroes of the stories, a child may very well draw the subconscious conclusion that rule-breaking is acceptable. Following Jacobs's lead, Christian parents should recognize and discuss with their children that the moral complexity of the books is higher. Despite which analysis is correct, the Harry Potter books should lead to excellent opportunities for parents to discuss moral issues with their children. Whether or not Dumbledore actually functions as the moral standard in Harry's world, parents can contrast the moral standards of Harry's world with the moral standards of the real world — God's world. If the moral standard of Harry's world is subjectivism, as Abanes concludes, then the Harry Potter series presents the even greater opportunity for practically applicable discussion, because moral subjectivism is widely practiced, and is encountered on a regular basis. Children need to learn to recognize it, to understand how it conflicts with Christianity, and to be able to explain why it is self-contradictory.

We have identified four general, interrelated and interdependent differences between children and adults:

1. Children are less able to deal with abstract ideas.
2. Children are morally unaware and naive by comparison.
3. Children are intellectually undeveloped by comparison.
4. Children are inexperienced by comparison.

We have seen how these differences build on one another, and we have seen each of them demonstrated by an example. We have seen that the responses of Christian parents to these differences ought to be

1. to set a good example by responsible participation in the arts.

2. to engage carefully with their children in participation in the arts.

Deliverance

We have examined several issues foundational to Christian involvement and interaction with art. Firstly, we developed a Christian understanding of personal stewardship and truth, concluding that

1. All areas of life are equally valuable to Christians, who should reject the popular but unbiblical valuational dichotomy between the "sacred" and the "secular".
2. God has given humanity stewardship over rational, moral, and artistic (creative) powers, as creatures made in His image. Scripture commands that Christians should be developing those powers as faithful stewards.
3. All truth is God's Truth and is unified, which implies that truth can be found virtually anywhere and in any context, and that Christians need to be seeking it out.
4. All beauty is God's Beauty, meaning that all beauty is derived from His beauty, and artistic works can be measured against it as the objective standard.
5. God has given Christians a cultural mandate, which demands that we engage seriously with the arts.

We proceeded to consider two popular but unscriptural views of purity that hamper Christians' involvement in the arts. In this section we concluded that observing sin or its portrayal is not sinful, though every Christian must always be careful to flee irresistible temptation. The observation of sin or its portrayal is justified when consuming art, because by consuming and criticizing (thinking seriously and interpretively about) artistic works, we perform the following biblically mandated tasks:

1. We demonstrate that all aspects of life and culture are valued by God and His people.
2. We exercise proper stewardship over our God-given reason and creative abilities.
3. We exercise our ability to discern between God's truth and falsehood, growing in our comprehension of a Christian worldview and the unity of truth.
4. We glorify God for the fruit of common grace with which He blesses all artists.

We subsequently examined the state of popular Christian interaction with art, and noted the prevalence of "superficial-moral" criticism, which focuses exclusively on the presence and absence of portrayals of sin. We explored frameworks of art consumption and criticism, as well as some of the elements fundamental to filmic, musical, and literary art. These explorations should encourage and, to some extent, enable Christians to embrace and pursue a God-centered, holistic view of film, music, and literature consumption and criticism. We concluded that it is our responsibility, as stewards of creativity and bearers of the Truth, to praise and appreciate artists for their artistry, constructively criticize artistic works for the offenses they may carry, and bring to light truth found in each work, and truth that can be emphasized by contrast with each work.

Lastly, we saw that special consideration is in order when children are concerned.

We identified four general, interrelated and interdependent differences between children and adults:

1. Children are less able to deal with abstract ideas.
2. Children are morally unaware and naive by comparison.
3. Children are intellectually undeveloped by comparison.
4. Children are inexperienced by comparison.

We concluded that Christian parents ought to set good examples of responsible participation in the arts, in part by carefully engaging with their children in participation in the arts.

With the best of intentions, popular Christianity has vilified, or at least marginalized, the biblical approach to exercising human creativity. A superficial reading of the Bible has resulted in a superficial understanding of our creation in the image of God, and a superficial approach to culture, the arts, and the fullness of the life God asks us to live to His glory.

Tertullian challenged us by asking "What indeed has Athens to do with Jerusalem?" When Tertullian asked the question, "Athens" referred to the secular academy. Even if we extend his "Athens" to include the arts, human culture, and life in general, we must answer that Athens is to be embraced, understood, and appreciated by God's servant Jerusalem, as history marches toward Athens's redemption by God through Jerusalem. Let us be the stewards God commands us to be:

**"For everyone who has will be given more, and he will have an abundance. Whoever does not have, even what he has will be taken from him."
– Matthew 25:29**

Addendum: Objections, Critiques, and Initial Replies

1. My paper fails to distinguish sufficiently between art and entertainment, thus calling into serious question the meaning and application of the "cultural mandate". To whom is this cultural mandate given? Does it apply to every Christian all the time, or only to some, some of the time? What are the differing roles of art and entertainment in the life of the Christian, and how should they be treated differently?

This is an important critique that probes at the foundation of my message. I haven't worked the answers to all of its questions out for myself yet, so I am biding my time while I consider how to revise my writing without 1) castrating it or 2) obfuscating the issues.

2. Concerning Philippians 4:8 — I began by attempting to show a view that isn't true, and ended up trying to affirm one without sufficient authority to do so.

Affirming an alternative view is not necessary to my intent in that section, and I am considering the appropriate revisions.

3. Liberty can result in the appearance of hypocrisy.
Society shares many of the views debunked within this paper. It is very possible that people will think we are hypocrites for watching R-rated movies, reading certain books, or listening to certain music. Some may be tempted to succumb to this un-biblical restriction on Christian engagement with art "for the sake of their witness". A better course is (with discretion on a case-by-case basis) to engage fully with the arts as we ought to do, in order to serve as a biblical model for Christian engagement with art. Then when lookers-on begin to judge, we can expound the whole truth about Christianity, and how it encompasses every area of life.
4. Romans 14 & 1 Cor. 8
Perhaps fold this into changes for objection #3; perhaps keep it separate.