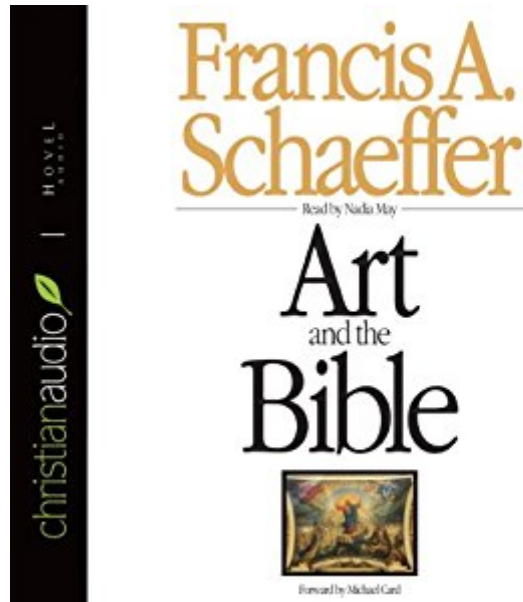




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# Art And The Bible: Two Essays



## Synopsis

"The lordship of Christ should include an interest in the arts," writes Francis Schaeffer. "A Christian should use these arts to the glory of God, not just as tracts, mind you, but as things of beauty to the praise of God." Many Christians, wary of creating graven images, have steered clear of artistic creativity. But the Bible offers a robust affirmation of the arts. The human impulse to create reflects our being created in the image of a creator God. Art and the Bible has been a foundational work for generations of Christians in the arts. In this book's classic essays, Francis Schaeffer first examines the scriptural record of the use of various art forms, and then establishes a Christian perspective on art. With clarity and vigor, Schaeffer explains why "the Christian is the one whose imagination should fly beyond the stars." --This text refers to the Mass Market Paperback edition.

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## Customer Reviews

This short little book is an excellent entry-point for thinking biblically about art and artistry. I think it was originally two different essays on art, the first a biblical consideration and the second more focused on what a biblically Christian approach to art might look like in real life. Personally, I kind of prefer Rookmaaker's Art Needs No Justification, which is similarly concise, but I think Schaffer makes some very solid and good points. I especially like how he differentiates technical ability and creativity from worldview, which is very insightful. I found the book a pretty easy read and very accessible. I think any aspiring artist (of any art), would be well served reading and thinking through what Schaeffer has laid out. I also think it would be especially good for pastors to read this book to

complement whatever approach to art they are working through in their churches.

Francis Schaeffer's book *Art and the Bible* is a classic when it comes to developing a Biblical theology of the arts or in thinking about theology and the arts Christianly. Almost every book about the arts or theology in the arts, from a Christian worldview that has come out since this book was first published in 1973, references Schaeffer's *Art and the Bible*. The book began as two separate essays, the first essay is *Art and the Bible* and the second is *Some Perspectives on Art*. These separate essays were combined and published as the comprehensive and concise book *Art and the Bible*. In this thought provoking and essential work advocating for the arts, Schaeffer outlines a sound Biblical apologetic for the arts. Schaeffer addresses all types of art from architecture, to statuary, bas-relief, poetry, painting, music, drama and dance, to the art of Heaven itself. The Biblical support of art of all kinds is presented clearly by Schaeffer who walks the reader carefully and thoroughly through important supportive passages in both the Old and New Testaments. In the book's foreword, by Michael Card, added in the revised 2006 edition, Card says, "this book, a primer on Biblical creativity, [seeks] to drum into us the idea that we create out of our worldview and that it is our responsibility to align that point of view with scripture before we continue on." Card rightly highlights one of Schaeffer's main points that the artist should "take seriously the Lordship of Christ in every aspect of their creative lives."

This book, a collection of two essays about art and its relationship to Christianity and Christian philosophy is fascinating. First, one major positive is Schaeffer's calling for the Christian to apply several criteria to art and the evaluation of it. He strongly discourages a purely "romantic" interpretation of art (meaning just how it makes you "feel.") He implores the Christian (and the non-Christian for that matter) to make full use of both intellect and emotion (as well as a host of other criteria.) The first essay concentrates on what the Bible actually has to say about art. The second essay concentrates on the physical creation of art, intention of art, impact, and several other dimensions of this many-sided subject. It touches on some basic principals of philosophy of art as well as the Christian world view. Also, of extreme importance is the subsection on art within its cultural context. My only complaint is the short length of the book. Schaeffer occasionally didn't fully explore an idea. I know an exhaustive treatise could never be devised, but this is a lot of subject matter to tackle in a 63 page book. On the other hand though, this concise pamphlet will get his ultimate points across and is accessible to those who don't have philosophy or art history degrees. This book is a welcome addition to both art criticism and the Christian perspective on art.

Art and the Bible was published in 1973 by Francis Schaeffer and his L'Abri Fellowship as an inquiry into the place of the arts in the Bible and the Christian life. It is now marked as one of the foundational works in the theology of the arts, particularly because of its efforts in developing a specifically biblical theology from an evangelical perspective. The book consists of two essays: the first focusing on what the scriptures say about art; the second elaborating upon a picture of the arts for Christianity. In the first essay, Schaeffer examines the role of the arts as portrayed in the scriptures, and this primarily in the Old Testament. A common foundation can be seen among those who think and write in the field of theology and the arts, and that is a holistic understanding of creation and humanity in which there stands no true antagonism between the spiritual and the physical, and this thought is what begins Schaeffer's first essay. He arrives at this holistic perspective from the Biblical teaching that God is sovereign over all creation, and he points to four important points he says that the Bible "makes clear", namely: \* God made the whole man \* In Christ the whole man is redeemed \* Christ is the Lord of the whole man now and the Lord of the whole Christian life \* In the future as Christ comes back, the body will be raised from the dead and the whole man will have a whole redemption. (7-8) The implication drawn from this is that since God is Lord over the whole of man and creation, he is Lord over the creative arts as well. From this point Schaeffer moves to a discussion on art having to do with worship, and he begins this with one of the most common objections against Christian involvement in the arts: "Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image" (Ex 20:4-5). He explains that if this is properly interpreted, it can be seen as not a restriction against graven images per se, but against the worship of them. This is evinced in the fact that at the same time God gave the ten commandments, he also gave the instructions for building the tabernacle; in these instructions were included "almost every form of representational art that men have ever known," Schaeffer says. (12). Among these forms of representational art were blue pomegranates. Schaeffer points to this as an indication that God enjoys art that is not necessarily "photographic," but there is freedom for the imagination to expand upon the "real." From the tabernacle, Schaeffer moves to a discussion on the artistic nature of the temple. The design of the temple that the Spirit of the Lord handed David (1 Chron. 28:11-12) we see full of non-utilitarian art. In 2 Chron. 3:6, for example, Solomon "garnished the house with precious stones for beauty." From this, Schaeffer rightly concludes that "God is interested in beauty" (15). Also he importantly notes that we see more than specifically religious subject material used in worship-related art, which means that "specifically religious subjects are not necessary for art" (19). Next, Schaeffer considers the "secular art" of Solomon's day. This secular art of which he speaks is Solomon's throne,

described in (1 Kings 10:18-20). However, it seems questionable whether or not Solomon's throne would be considered "secular." As Israel was a theocracy, it seems as though it would be difficult to make such a distinction between "secular" and "religious" art. What would seem to be more appropriate would be to look at the arts in the other cultures surrounding Israel at that time, which he does not do. In his discussion poetry, Schaeffer, using an example from the Septuagint of David singing, shows that art does not have to be put into the temple in order for it to give praise to God. He also points to the Song of Solomon as an example of secular art that has been inspired, in a way, by God. From poetry, Schaeffer shows that drama and dance too is not only allowed but are used and encouraged in the Bible. Ezekiel plays out a drama as a prophesy, and David danced victoriously in his ephod. Schaeffer does right to point out that simply because someone does something in the Bible does not mean that it is prescriptive. Finally, pointing to the music and song in Revelation 15:2-3, Schaeffer shows that God has a plan for the arts even in the afterlife. Schaeffer's work in providing these examples of the arts from the Bible is an invaluable tool with which to counter the attitudes that express some contempt for the arts. However, because virtually all of the examples are taken from the Old Testament, it might lose weight to a reader who interprets the New Testament as being a switch from the physical to the spiritual. In his second essay entitled "Some Perspectives in Art", Schaeffer enumerates eleven perspectives from which a Christian can view art. He begins with what he says is the most important point for Christians to consider, namely that a work of art has intrinsic value. Schaeffer says that it is "not something we merely analyze or value for its intellectual content. It is something to be enjoyed" (34). It has this value because it is a creative work, and creative work has value because it is a product of our being made in the image of God. While Schaeffer is on the right track with these thoughts, he seems to be a bit myopic in his understanding of art. It is true that art is not simply to be analyzed for its intellectual content, however that is at least part of what we do with art. He seems to acknowledge this later by chiding the "art for art's sake" perspective. He goes on to say that art is something to be "enjoyed" in and of itself, yet he seems to forget that some art is not "enjoyed," especially art that is prophetic in nature. In his first essay he pointed to Ezekiel performing the prophetic "drama" for Israel, and Schaeffer affirmed this as art. Yet was Ezekiel's drama "enjoyed" in and of itself apart from its intellectual content? The point of prophetic art is not to be "enjoyed," but on the contrary, to be disruptive to a people's status quo. Next, Schaeffer touches on the interesting notion that "the effect of any proposition, whether true or false, can be heightened if it is expressed in poetry or in artistic prose rather than in bald, formulaic statement" (38-39). This is a point well made, and an important one to consider, though it is unfortunate he did not spend more time elaborating upon

this. His third point addresses the continuity or discontinuity with normal definitions in a work of art. He applies this not only to the use of words (in poetry and prose), but in the visual language of symbols as well. He suggests that there must, for greatest effect, be not too great a discontinuity. Innovation is good, but when one diverges too far from the norm (such as in total abstract painting), something is lost in the piece of art. Fourth, he states that simply because something is "art" does not mean that it is "sacred." This he ties into his second point, that the propositions contained in a piece of art can be false. Schaeffer next moves to the four criteria by which he believes art should be judged. First, art should be judged by its technical execution. If art is done with technical excellence, Schaeffer says that the artist should be praised even if he differs in worldview. This is a particularly challenging and needed statement since many Christians reject art completely if it differs even slightly from their version of Christian truth. Next, art should be judged by its validity: whether or not the artist has been honest to himself in the creation of his art. At this point Schaeffer criticizes any art that is created for financial reason, labeling it "invalid." This is, however, an invalid criticism because of its myopic idea of what the creative mind is and what its parameters are. For example, if this criteria were applied to the art of filmmaking there would be few--if any at all--that meet it. Film is a corporate art, an art that involves more than one mind, and thus involves individual creative ideals bending to one another in cooperation and, often, compromise. Likewise, the sheer amount of financial resources that are required to produce a film entail a kind sensitivity to those who will watch it. Rather than automatically labeling any art "invalid" that is done for a patron, the art should be judged by how "valid" it is within its parameters (e.g., the patron's wishes, the public's interest, etc.). The third criteria Schaeffer says art should be judged by is whether or not the worldview it espouses is consistent with the scripture, and this he says can actually be accomplished by the non-Christian, and can sometimes not be accomplished by the Christian. The last criteria is how well the content of the art matches its form. The example he uses for this is T.S. Eliot's *The Wasteland*: in it the broken nature of the message was reflected in the broken form in which it was written. Regarding style, Schaeffer says that it changes as language changes, but that the Christian should have these three elements in his style: it should be the style of his day, it should be indigenous to where he is geographically, and it should reflect the Christian worldview. In his next point, he asserts that while there is no "godly" or "ungodly" style, some styles become symbolic of a certain message, and thus styles must not be used unthinkingly. Schaeffer then suggests that Christian art has a place for both major and minor themes--minor themes that uncover the lostness and brokenness of man, major themes that offer a positive perspective in light of redemption--but the emphasis should be on the major themes. He does make room for individual pieces of art to

show only minor themes, but he says that the full body of the artists work should reflect the major. He does well to leave room for exceptions in this, because it should also be considered that the many artists in the Christian community are members of one body; perhaps it is one person's job to focus on minor, and the other person's to focus on redemption. What makes this pamphlet particularly unique is its depth of focus on what the scriptures say about the arts, but his second essay on Christian perspectives is also helpful in that it attempts to apply more specifically what we find about art in the Bible. In total, Schaeffer's *Art and the Bible* can serve as a helpful tool especially for the evangelical who needs an introductory Christian perspective on the arts.

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