Here you are, doing your Omnibus reading. You have been reading great books, thinking big ideas, engaging Western civilization, and getting an education second to none. If you had been born a few decades earlier, you would probably not be doing this.

There was a time not long ago when conservative Protestant Christians largely ignored their cultural heritage and the world outside the walls of their churches. Art, literature, philosophy, politics—all of that was “worldly,” they believed. True biblical Christians, many were saying, should separate themselves from such secular concerns and concentrate on their spiritual lives. Many Christian schools concentrated on just teaching the Bible, along with basic reading, writing, and arithmetic—the bare minimum necessary to make a living until the Lord returns.

Those of you who feel run over by the Omnibus may wish that you had lived in those simpler times. You do realize, of course, that this position of Christians having nothing to do with our civilization is another of those modern travesties that, though it sounds pious, it really falls short of biblical truth. You have gone through enough of the Omnibus curriculum to know that Christians have done more than anyone else to build our civilization and that even

The first time God filled someone with His Spirit it was not for preaching, or for battle, but for art. Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying: “See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son of Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of workmanship.” —Exodus 31:1–5
when it has gone wrong, getting bogged down in false worldviews, Christians have always been battling the bad ideas. Furthermore, you know that even what is seemingly “secular”—art, science, nature, history, and everything else that is real—could not exist apart from God’s creation and His sovereignty and that the biblical worldview embraces all of life.

At any rate, one of the men who was most responsible for helping evangelical Christians re-engage the culture again was Francis A. Schaeffer. If you have ever used the term “worldview,” if you are an advocate of the pro-life movement, and if your parents allow you to be exposed to anything other than Sunday School art, you probably have Francis Schaeffer to thank.

**General Information**

**Author and Context**

Francis Schaeffer (1912–1984) was a Presbyterian minister, serving congregations in Pennsylvania and St. Louis. Caught up in the various denominational splits and controversies that roiled Reformed churches in the 1930s and 1940s, in which he stood strongly for the inerrancy of Scripture, Schaeffer became burnt out with church politics. In 1948 he left the United States to become a missionary in Europe.

Schaeffer and his wife Edith settled in Switzerland. In 1955 they bought a chalet in the Alps. They called it L’Abri, which is French for “the shelter.” They opened their home to travelers, and it soon became a study center for whoever wanted to wrestle with the big questions of life.

College students backpacking through Europe trying to find themselves, hippies looking for a new experience, people seeking to fill the God-shaped vacuum in their hearts—they heard about this place in the mountains and made their way to L’Abri. Here Schaeffer and a growing Christian community engaged them with conversation, biblical thinking, and the gospel. Thousands became Christians. Thousands of Christians, many of whom were disillusioned with the shallowness of the Christianity they had known, also passed through L’Abri, eager for the bigger vision of Christianity that Schaeffer opened up for them.

Schaeffer’s books, which were based on the lectures he gave at L’Abri, began coming out in the late 1960s and soon brought him a larger audience. In 1976 he came out with a documentary film entitled *How Shall We Then Live?* in which Schaeffer stood among ruins and in front of classic works of art to analyze “the rise and decline of Western culture.” This was followed in 1979 with another documentary, *Whatever Happened to the Human Race?*, in which Schaeffer appeared with Surgeon-General C. Everett Koop to attack abortion, euthanasia, and genetic engineering.

Schaeffer developed cancer and in 1978 he and his wife moved to Rochester, Minnesota, so that he could receive treatment at the Mayo Clinic. Another L’Abri site formed around their new home. He died in 1984.

This is a portrait of Francis Schaeffer mimicking the style of Andy Warhol. And who knows? If Warhol had lived longer, he might have done just such a painting. In *The Religious Art of Andy Warhol* Jane Daggett Dillenberger shows the importance of faith to the pop artist. For example, in the two years before he died, Warhol made seventy paintings based on Leonardo da Vinci’s “Last Supper” as well as prints based on Renaissance religious paintings.
continues, though, with 11 sites around the world where people can ask questions about Christianity, listen to recordings of Schaeffer’s lectures, and think through the implications of the Bible for all of life.

Significance

Schaeffer’s little book on art, *Art and the Bible*, based on two of his lectures on the subject, is a good example of how he helped conservative Protestants to re-engage with the larger civilization by means of a rigorous application of the Bible.

He counters the objections that the Bible says little about art—and that what it does say opposes art—by showing that the Bible actually says a great deal about art. At a number of points in Scripture, God commands that art be built. In fact, the Bible mentions favorably nearly every kind of art that there is.

Schaeffer points to Bible passages that are almost never preached on and that are the bane of many well-intentioned Bible-reading projects, the tedious—but no less inspired—directions for constructing the Tabernacle and the Temple, going on and on for chapter after chapter. To adorn His worship, God requires representational art depicting both the spiritual realm (cherubim) and the natural realm (lions, oxen, palm trees, lilies). He demands symbolic art (the Ark of the Covenant) and abstract art (the two freestanding pillars in front of the Temple that support no weight and have no architectural function). He calls for non-realistic art, demanding for the priest’s garments not just scarlet and purple pomegranates but blue pomegranates, even though there are no blue pomegranates in God’s creation.

The Bible also shows the employment of other kinds of art: drama (in some of the prophets’ signs), poetry (the Psalms), songs (of David), instrumental music (in the Levites assigned to play music for the Temple worship). We could also add fiction (the parables), tapestry (the Tabernacle), architecture (the Temple).

*The Lamentation of Christ* is one of the frescos painted by Giotto di Bondone (c. 1267–1337) for the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua, Italy. His work on this chapel is considered a masterpiece of the Early Renaissance.
Schaeffer asks, in a brilliant question. “What about the universe? The birds? The trees? The mountains? What about the bird’s song? And the sound of the wind in the trees? When God created out of nothing by His spoken word, he did not just create ‘religious’ objects.”

In the second chapter, Schaeffer offers, as the title says, “Some Perspectives on Art.” He emphasizes that art has value in itself, as art. A painting, a novel, or a piece of music must first be approached, appreciated, and evaluated as an aesthetic object, not just grabbed onto for its message, even if it is a Christian message.

This makes it possible to appreciate a work, even though we may disagree with what it says. Ernest Hemingway, for example, is a really good novelist. His descriptions are vivid, his characters come alive, and his style is gripping. I totally reject, though, his existentialist worldview, in which his characters are always creating some private code of their own so that they can make their way through a meaningless world. I enjoy reading Hemingway, but I do not let that sell me on his sadly deficient worldview.

Conversely, it is possible to agree with an artist while recognizing that their art is utterly incompetent. For example, I won’t mention any names, but there are some Christian authors who express a fine biblical message. And yet their descriptions are clichés, their characters are stereotypes, and their style is tedious.

The writers who are excellent in both style and content, of course, write the kind of books you read in Omnibus, but these are rare. Schaeffer hopes to inspire evangelical Christians to become that kind of artist.

His other pointers in the second chapter can help to that end. Schaeffer points out that a good artist must possess “validity”; that is, he must not sell out his artistic integrity to the marketplace, producing what will sell, rather than what needs to be expressed. Styles are always changing, he observes, and Christianity can manifest itself in a wide variety of styles. Christian artists of today must not simply follow the styles of the past. “If you are a young Christian artist, you should be working in the art forms of the twentieth (or twenty-first) century, showing the marks of the culture out of which you have

Although Scripture warns against the misuse of the arts, as in idolatry, as Schaeffer says, “God is interested in beauty.” This is also evident in God’s creation. His own art. “Is God’s creation totally involved with religious subjects?”

Schaeffer hopes to inspire evangelical Christians to become that kind of artist.

An idol or a beautiful sculpture in tribute to our triumphant Savior? Gian Lorenzo Bernini’s The Risen Christ was commissioned in 1673 by Pope Clement X to stand atop the tabernacle of the Chapel of the Blessed Sacrament in St. Peter’s Basilica. This is the initial, flawed bronze cast. In this sculpture Christ’s body is reminiscent of beautiful idols carved of the sun god Apollo. This is in stark contrast to Isaiah’s prophecy of Jesus: “He has no form or comeliness . . . There is no beauty that we should desire Him.”
come, reflecting your own country and your own contemporariness, and embodying something of the nature of the world as seen from a Christian standpoint.”

Schaeffer hoped that this book would inspire and equip evangelicals to become that “young Christian artist.” Maybe that could be you!

Setting

The original debate between the Modernists and the Fundamentalists in the 1920s and 1930s was a high-powered intellectual and theological conflict between those who wanted to liberalize Christianity so that it conformed with the times and those who insisted on holding to the tenets of historical Christianity. The Fundamentalists, led by intellectual heavy-weights such as J. Gresham Machen, could be said to have won the argument. But Machen and the equally formidable Cornelius Van Til were driven out of Princeton University, whereupon they founded Westminster Theological Seminary. The dominant Presbyterian Church of that time embraced Modernism, as would soon most other mainline Protestant denominations. This, in turn, resulted in a plethora of smaller, more conservative new church bodies.

With the Scopes trial of 1926, in which a teacher was prosecuted for teaching Darwin’s theory of evolution, “fundamentalists” lost their cultural respectability. Many Christians in the new church bodies considered that they had lost the culture wars and that they should turn their attention away from the world. “Fundamentalist” became a synonym for a Christian who believes in separating from the world. By the 1960s, though, many conservative Protestants who believed that Christians should engage the world began calling themselves by a different name: “evangelical.” Francis Schaeffer, who studied at Westminster under both Machen and Van Til, became a key figure in this evangelical movement.

Recall too that the 1960s and 1970s, when L’Abri was at its height, were the age of the counter-culture, youth rebellion, and non-conformity. Schaeffer—with his longish hair, goatee, and Alpine garb complete with lederhosen—came across to the restless young people of the time as a wise old man of the mountains. Though Schaeffer acknowledged and agreed with many of the complaints young people had with “the establishment”—the rampant materialism, the dehumanization of technology, the hypocrisy of previous generations—he pointed them to Christ and the Bible as giving the answers they yearned for.

Schaeffer is also credited—or blamed—for promoting Christian political activism. His documentary Whatever Happened to the Human Race? and his book A Christian Manifesto spurred evangelical Protestants to become involved in the pro-life movement. Before Schaeffer raised the issue, many evangelicals considered abortion to be a “Catholic issue” and were pro-choice.

When it comes to art, the subject of Art and the Bible, to this very day Protestant Christians—the heirs of great artists such as Dürer, Cranach, Rembrandt, the Dutch Masters, the Hudson River school, and many more—are often indifferent to art and aesthetics. Christians often insist that art, to be acceptable, has to express an explicit Christian message. Contemporary churches are often notoriously ugly. Though Schaeffer’s book has inspired and encouraged legions of evangelical artists, the arts are arguably the sphere in which Schaeffer’s influence still has a long way to go.

Worldview

That we even are talking about “worldview” is a sign of Schaeffer’s influence. Schaeffer was not so much an original theologian as a popularizer of the ideas of several Reformed theologians, specifically, Abraham Kuyper (for his worldview analysis), Herman Dooyeweerd (for his philosophical approach), and Cornelius Van Til (for his presuppositional apologetics, to which Schaeffer added some evidentialist elements). This tiny book on art demonstrates many of the main themes of Schaeffer’s thought.

“Despite our constant talk about the Lordship of Christ,” Schaeffer writes at the very beginning of the book, “we have narrowed its scope to a very small area of reality. We have misunderstood the concept of the Lordship of Christ over the whole of man and the whole of the universe and have not taken to us the riches that the Bible gives us for ourselves, for our lives, and for our culture.” In contrast, Schaeffer believes that the Lordship of Christ extends to all of life, including the arts.

Schaeffer’s expansive vision of the Lordship of Christ has to do with his view of objective truth. “If Christianity is really true,” he writes, “then it involves the whole man, including his intellect and creativeness. Christianity is not just ‘dogmatically’ true or ‘doctrinally’ true. Rather, it is true to what is there, true in the whole area of the whole man in all of life.”

Throughout the book, Schaeffer sometimes alludes to a distinction between the “upper story” and the “lower story” of human thought and experience. This is a metaphor he developed in some of his other books, particularly Escape from Reason. Now that human beings have largely drifted away from the wholeness of the biblical worldview, the tendency has been to divide our minds into an “upper story” of irrationalism and a “lower story”
experience, meaning that it does not have to make any kind of sense. Not only Christianity but also the classical tradition, which sees “beauty” and “truth” as being profoundly related, have a better way of approaching the arts.

Schaeffer, again, was a popularizer. He was not an expert in all of the fields he addressed, so he sometimes made mistakes. Some Christian scholars fault him for under-appreciating our classical heritage with the Greeks and the Romans. He also, arguably, missed much of value in the Middle Ages.

Sometimes he made out-and-out mistakes. For example, in this book he says that the artists Cimabue (c. 1240–1302) and Giotto (1267–1337) are from “the high renaissance.” But these men were contemporaries of Thomas Aquinas! The 1200s and the 1300s marked “the high middle ages,” not the renaissance, which, properly speaking, reached its “high” mark in the 1500s with Michelangelo and Leonardo DaVinci.

But these are quibbles. We owe Schaeffer a great deal. Especially those of you riding this Omnibus.

—Gene Edward Veith

For Further Reading


Madonna and Child by Luca Signorelli (c. 1445–1523) depicts Mary adoring her Son. In Western art the infant Jesus was often shown nude in order to emphasize the humanity of Christ and to refute various Christological heresies.
SESSION I: PRELUDE

A Question to Consider

What place do the arts have in the lives of those who are committed to being followers of Christ?

We should engage in the arts because God commands that art be made in the Bible, the Bible mentions favorably nearly every kind of art that there is, and it brings glory to God to reflect His creativity in our creativity.

From the General Information above, answer the following questions:

1. Why did conservative Protestant Christians separate themselves from cultural pursuits like art, literature, philosophy, and politics?
   They believed all of that was “worldly.” True biblical Christians, many were saying, should separate themselves from such secular concerns and concentrate on their spiritual lives.

2. What does L’Abri mean, and why is it significant in the life of Francis Schaeffer?
It is French for “the shelter.” It is also the name Schaeffer and his wife Edith gave to a chalet in the Alps that they opened to travelers and whoever wanted to wrestle with the big questions of life.

3. How did Schaeffer’s art essays confront common religious objections to art?
Schaeffer showed that the Bible actually says a great deal about art—even pointing out that in the Bible God commanded that art be made.

4. What types of art does Schaeffer assert are acceptable according to the Bible?
Architecture, representational art (depicting both the spiritual realm and the natural realm), symbolic art, abstract art, non-realistic art, sculpture, drama, poetry, songs, and more.

5. How is it possible to appreciate a work, even though we may disagree with what it says?
Schaeffer says that art has value in itself, as art. A painting, a novel, or a piece of music must first be approached, appreciated, and evaluated as an aesthetic object, not just grabbed onto for its message, even if it is a Christian message.

Reading Assignment:
Art and the Bible. Chapter 1

Solomon overseeing the construction of the Temple, as imagined by Jean Fouquet in this fifteenth-century illumination in a French version of Josephus’ Antiquities of the Jews.
**Session II: Recitation**  
_Art and the Bible, Chapter 1_  

**Comprehension Questions**

_Answer the following questions for factual recall:_

1. How is the Christian view of reality directly opposed to the platonist view?  
   **There is no dichotomy. God made the body as well as the soul, and redemption is for the whole man. Christ is coming back, and we will be raised from the dead—physically, not just spiritually (chap. 1).**

2. Francis Bacon said that man’s loss of innocence due to the Fall could be repaired through religion and faith. According to Bacon, how could man’s dominion over nature be repaired?  
   **Man’s dominion over nature could be repaired through the sciences and the arts (chap. 1).**

3. Schaeffer says that art can be a doxology in praise of God, but in the Ten Commandments we are told not to make any graven images. How can both be true?  
   **Leviticus 26:1 clarifies the intent of the commandment: “You shall not make idols for yourselves; neither a carved image nor a sacred pillar shall you rear up for yourselves; nor shall you set up an engraved stone in your land, to bow down to it; for I am the LORD your God.” To worship art is wrong, but to make art—even of spiritual beings—is not wrong (chap. 1).**

4. The art found in the Tabernacle involves almost every form of representational art in the world. What were some of the styles of art required by God?  
   **Constructing the Tabernacle God required that there would be statuary, representative art (two and three-dimensional) of angels and nature, and imaginative unrealistic designs (chap. 1).**

5. Schaeffer points out that the Temple was covered with precious stones for beauty: “There was no pragmatic purpose. God simply wanted beauty in the temple. God is interested in beauty.” Read 2 Chronicles 3 and list the examples of different art forms.  
   **The Temple’s gold walls were carved with palm trees and chainwork. This kind of art is called bas-relief (sculpture in which the projection from the surrounding surface is slight and no part of the modeled form is undercut). In the Holy of Holies there were free-standing, three-dimensional sculptures covered with gold. Textile arts are featured in the famous veil hiding the Holy of Holies—a veil of blue, purple, crimson, and fine linen, woven with representations of cherubim. In front of the Temple was what in museums today would be called installation art—two pillars, each over fifty feet high with wreaths of chainwork on top and one hundred pomegranates in the chainwork. Finally the crafts are represented in carpentry and jewelry—the altar of gold, tables for the showbread, lampstands, bowls, ladles, and more (chap. 1).**

6. To what did Schaeffer draw our attention to demonstrate secular art in Scripture?  
   **Schaeffer described Solomon’s lion throne (chap. 1).**

7. How did Jesus use art in His ministry?  
   **He used the example of the bronze serpent as an illustration to help his listeners see the need for his crucifixion (chap. 1).**

8. At the end of the chapter, what other forms of aesthetic expression does Schaeffer show to be scriptural?  
   **Schaeffer explains how poetry, music, drama, and dance are all legitimate means to praise God (chap. 1).**

The next session will be a student-led discussion. Students will be creating their own questions concerning the issue of the session. Students should create three Text Analysis Questions, two Cultural Analysis questions, and two Biblical Analysis questions. For more detailed instructions, please see the chapter on _Death on the Nile_, Session V.

**Issue**

What should a church building look like?

**Reading Assignment:**  
None

**Session III:**  
_Student-Led Discussion_  

**A Question to Consider**

What should a church building look like?  
It should be a lovely space that encourages people to worship. It should be a graceful space that is distinctive from common architecture. There is certainly a great deal of freedom in designing such spaces, but it is hard to imagine Bezalel coming back to Moses suggesting something that looks like a warehouse if he had the funds to build something that reflected the majesty and beauty of God. It is also hard to imagine David
telling Solomon of his hopes that his son would build an all-purpose room with basketball hoops that folded down over the Holy of Holies.

While this is true, we must also recognize that our congregations “are where we are” and might not have the funds to be able to take too many aesthetic concerns into account. The earliest Christians often worshipped in grave yards (because their Roman persecutors feared them), so we know that God’s presence does not depend upon our aesthetic judgments. He is present in our worship when we worship, whether we worship in storefronts, gymnasiums, grave yards, or cathedrals.

Students should read and consider the example questions below that are connected to the Question to Consider above. Last session’s assignment was to prepare three questions and answers for the Text Analysis section and two additional questions and answers for both the Cultural and Biblical Analysis sections below.

**Text Analysis**

*Example:* Schaeffer asserts that God is interested in beauty and that beauty has a place in the worship of God. Then why are so many churches made today that are ugly?

*Answer:* Schaeffer concludes that the evangelical community fails to understand that beauty should be to the praise of God. This shallowness is reflected in our theology, our worship, our singing, our church architecture, and our lives (chap. 1).

**Cultural Analysis**

*Example:* Doesn’t good stewardship demand that churches ought to devote their resources to the bare minimum when it comes to facilities and send everything else overseas to missionaries?

*Answer:* Second Chronicles 3:15–17 says:

Also he made in front of the temple two pillars thirty-five cubits high, and the capital that was on the top of each of them was five cubits. He made wreaths of chainwork, as in the inner sanctuary, and put them on top of the pillars; and he made one hundred pomegranates, and put them on the wreaths of chainwork. Then he set up the pillars before the temple, one on the right hand and the other on the left; he called the name of the one on the right hand Jachin, and the name of the one on the left Boaz.

These two pillars were completely useless for supporting the building or for any other “practical” purpose. They served as huge (literally) reminders that God was interested in beauty in worship that had no pragmatic use. Thus, when building a structure dedicated to worship, believers do have an example that would lead them to consider how to express the beauty and majesty of God even if these expressions are costly and serve no practical purpose.

**Biblical Analysis**

*Example:* Jesus said that we are supposed to worship God in spirit and in truth, so therefore isn’t it best if we leave all representational art out of worship?

*Answer:* Worship in spirit and truth should not be contrasted with worship that is beautiful or that is in the material world. God does not expect us to leave our bodies behind when we go to worship. “Spirit and truth” worship is not (has not been and should not be) synonymous with ugly worship—or an ugly worship environment. First Kings 6:29 it says, “Then he carved all the walls of the temple all around, both the inner and outer sanctuaries, with carved figures of cherubim, palm trees, and open flowers.”

The Temple was a place of wonder and beauty. It was a place designed by God for His worship. Thus, considerations of beauty should not be set aside but instead should be carefully considered as we build our church buildings.

**Summa**

Write an essay or discuss this question, integrating what you have learned from the material above.

What should a church look like?

Overall, if we have the ability and resources, it should be beautiful. Schaeffer wrote, “Christ is the Lord of our whole life and the Christian life should produce not only truth—flaming truth—but also beauty.” The attention given in Scripture to the beauty in the Temple gives us some clue as to the importance that art should have in the life of the church. Beyond that, the building should love its neighbors and so complement the surrounding community’s aesthetic. The church building should reflect the theology of the church as well as it can through the visual medium of architecture.

In spite of the bleak landscape with regard to church architecture, all is not lost. There are many buildings that can be presented as examples of imaginative, beautiful spaces that can serve to bring glory to God.

**Reading Assignment:**

*Art and the Bible, Chapter 2*
SESSION IV: RECITATION
Art and the Bible, Chapter 2

Comprehension Questions

Answer the following questions for factual recall:

1. Why does a work of art have value in itself?
   First, because the work shows creativity, and creativity has value because of our Creator God. Second, a work of art has value because man is made in the image of God and he reflects that image when he creates (chap. 2).

2. What does art do to a worldview?
   Art forms add strength to a worldview, regardless if the worldview is true or false (chap. 2).

3. “Fear No Art” is the slogan of Chicago's Museum of Contemporary Art and can be found plastered on many cars' bumpers. How does that sentiment align with Schaeffer's view of art?

Schaeffer declared, “The fact that something is a work of art does not make it sacred.” So Christians should resist the art establishment’s position of placing art above criticism, and we should honestly, intelligently evaluate all art (chap. 2).

4. What are the four standards of judgment that Schaeffer suggests we apply to any work of art?
   Schaeffer’s four standards are: (1) technical excellence, (2) validity, (3) intellectual content, and (4) integration of content and vehicle (chap. 2).

5. What three things does Schaeffer assert concerning the style of Christian art?
   Christian art made today should be made in the art forms of today, it should be indigenous, and it should embody the Christian worldview (chap. 2).

6. What are the “major” and “minor” themes which should both be present in the art made by Christians?
   The major theme is positive—that God is there, life is not absurd, there is hope and good news. The minor theme is negative—that man has revolted against God, and life is broken (chap. 2).

7. What should be the subject matter of art made by Christians?
   A Christian should portray the totality of life. There is very little limit on subject, style, or form. One year at a L’Abri conference Wade Bradshaw said that the only limit was to love your neighbor (chap. 2).

Optional Activity

Art Walk

Many cities nowadays have a monthly evening set aside where the shops and galleries stay open late to showcase the opening of new art exhibits. Pick one of these evenings and walk downtown with friends to explore and learn. Set a goal for yourself to meet the artist at one of the galleries. Ask him about his work. Be humble. Love your neighbor. Learn what they are trying to show through their work. Remember that Schaeffer says, “the Christian’s life is to be an art work. The Christian’s life is to be a thing of truth and also a thing of beauty in the midst of a lost and despairing world.” Be beautiful, and try to uncover some beauty that you were not expecting to see.

If the artist is not available, pick one piece in the show and devote your time to it. Stare at it. Study it. Read about it. Look for patterns, repeating elements, and other visual clues. Put yourself in the artist’s shoes. The artist is your neighbor. Love your neighbor. After you have spent time looking at the piece and “listening” to it. Apply Schaeffer’s four standards to it:

TECHNICAL EXCELLENCE
VALIDITY
INTELLECTUAL CONTENT
INTEGRATION OF CONTENT AND VEHICLE

Another way to interact with the piece is to draw a diagram like Chart 1. Thinking through these categories on paper can help you to look at a piece more deeply and see
We sit down before the picture in order to have something done to us, not that we may do things with it. The first demand any work of art makes upon us is surrender. Look. Listen. Receive. Get yourself out of the way.

Or as Bruce Herman, an art professor at Gordon College has said, “If you want to ‘understand’ something, you have to be willing to ‘stand under’ it.” Resist jumping to judge the works and try to learn what they are trying to say in the way that they are trying to say it.

SESSION V: DEBATE

Nudity in Art

Note to homeschoolers: This activity will prove meaningful enough to make special efforts to include others. Consider other homeschool children near the same age to participate, or include other family members.

Today we are going to debate whether Christians should depict nudity in their art work. There can be strong feelings over this issue, so make sure that you treat your broth-

Edward Knippers’ paintings have occasionally been banned and even mutilated by those who viewed his art as heretical. But Knippers is deeply orthodox in his faith and theology, and in Christ Resisting Temptation his worldview comes through. We see Jesus, the second person of the Godhead, as fully human. As theologian A.D. Bauer writes, “Jesus’ obedience came out of His nature as an unfallen man. Jesus did not easily pass through trials by accessing power from His divinity. Jesus was the second Adam and He was obedient living out His goodness as an unfallen man in a fallen world. Jesus shows the world what Adam and Eve were before the fall and what they would have remained if they had not eaten the fruit.”
ers and sisters in Christ in this debate with care, courtesy and respect. Remember, whichever side of the debate you are on, you might be spending eternity with a number of people that feel differently than you do. Also, it is a wonderful variation on this class to make students argue well for the opposite of the opinion that they themselves hold so that they can see, perhaps, why other believers might feel differently than they do.

**Directions**

We are going to serve as judge and jury as we consider whether Christian artists should make art depicting nudity. To do this, follow these steps:

Split the participants into two teams. One will defend Christians portraying nudity in art, the other will argue that Christians should not portray nude characters. (If you are working alone, create arguments for both sides and share them with your parents or friends. After you present both sides, ask which side of the arguments was most convincing.)

Spend some time creating your arguments, then choose two people from each group to argue the case.

Ask another class, a group of friends, or your parents to serve as jury members.

Set a time limit for each argument. This format works well:

- 5 minutes per team for opening arguments
- 10 minutes per team for one side to question the other
- 5 minutes per team for closing arguments.
- Any left over time for questions from the audience to either side.

**Some Arguments For Christian Artists Using Nudity**

Edward Knippers discussed his own use of nudity in art in an interview:

I paint the nude. The nudity allows me to have a timelessness in my narratives that will not quite be pinned down to the specifics of the biblical era. The nudity allows me to show that God truly dealt with those people and at the same time to establish our human commonality with them. In other words it is my hope that the nudity establishes a universality. They had bodies in the same way we have bodies regardless of our divergent sociology. The body is the straight line—the common element—through human history. If God could talk to them then, then God can talk to us now.

I get in trouble with the nudity in my work. One guy in Tennessee actually attacked my paintings and tore three of them up. In an interview, he claimed that I made the Old and New Testaments into a nudist colony. I got to thinking about it—and he’s right. That’s exactly what God does. He strips us of all our pretenses. The Spirit isn’t hidden somewhere behind our bodies. It’s all one—we are spirit and flesh all wrapped up in something we call a human person.

The human body is at the center of my artistic imagination because the body is an essential element in the Christian doctrines of Creation, Incarnation and Resurrection. Unfortunately too many American Christians may be orthodox in theology but emotionally they are Gnostic. As Christians we must rethink the physicality of life—develop a decent theology of the body.

As Christians, we believe that God paid the ultimate price for our redemption. That would not be true if He had given us only His mind (and thus been merely a great teacher), or only His healing (a great physician), or even only His love (a compassionate friend). Without His body broken for us, His sacrifice would be incomplete, and we would be lost. For without the broken body there can be no redemptive resurrection.

Disembodiment therefore is not an option for the Christian. Christ places His body and His blood at the heart of our faith in Him. Our faith comes to naught if the Incarnation was not accomplished in actual time and space—if God did not send His Son to us in a real body, and therefore gender specific, with real blood. . . . Yet we are in an age that denies the proper understanding of the body in two ways. In one way it denies it through its extreme emphasis on sensuality and the worship of the physical as seen in contemporary sexual idolatry, including pornography. On the other hand we deny it by resorting to a kind of gnosticism, prudishly rejecting the physical creation’s importance and disdaining as evil what God Himself called good. Neither response is Christian. If we get too far from the body and the blood, either our
own or Christ’s, we are in trouble. Deny our body and blood, and we are in a fantasy world. Deny the body and blood of Christ, and we are lost. The body is therefore at the center of our faith.1

Other arguments that should be considered: God called Isaiah to go naked for years (Isaiah 20); Christian artists throughout history have portrayed nudity; and in Scripture there are other symbolic values to nakedness—judgment and shame, for example, or extreme poverty; also nudity and lust are certainly not synonymous.

SOME ARGUMENTS AGAINST CHRISTIAN ARTISTS USING NUDITY

The first and deepest objection to Christians using nudity in art is a biblical concern. God covers the fallen Adam. Adam and Eve find shame in their nudity. This is the case in this fallen world. God’s Word consistently condemns the uncovering of nudity. In Leviticus 18 and 20, many condemnations are given for the uncovering of nakedness. In Exodus 28, great care is taken concerning the clothing of the priest. Again, God is concerned with his nakedness being covered. Finally, in Exodus 20, God even instructs His people to avoid having steps leading up to their altars for fear that their nakedness would be exposed (remember they wore robes—not trousers). While some of these citations point to more than simple nudity (“uncover their nakedness” in Leviticus is certainly a euphemism for more than nudity), they at least prove that God is very concerned that nakedness be kept private and that nudity should not be displayed publicly. If God is so concerned for this, why shouldn’t Christian artists be? Therefore, nudity in art is inappropriate.

Besides biblical passages forbidding the public display of nudity, it is also the case that nudity can be a temptation to the sin of lust. Perhaps one could argue that not all people who see nudity in artwork would lust. This is not accusing Christian artists of creating pornography. In a world inundated with nudity, inappropriate unbiblical sexuality and lust, Christian artists should be even more careful. They should make sure that their work is not the cause of stumbling.

Lustfulness, however, is not the only problem. Nudity in art can also inspire the wrong sort of classicism which looks at man as the measure of all things. We see this in the very realistic nudity coming out of Greek rationalism (e.g., Protagoras) and the Renaissance (Da Vinci’s Vitruvian Man). The human body is, of course, beautiful and wonderful—it should be because man bears the Imago Dei (Image of God). Because of man’s wonder and beauty, he can easily become an idol—particularly when he is made into a “perfected” form rather than a real live person (with warts, scars, and imperfections). This sort of nudity—which does not aim at inspiring lust—might cause pride or wrong worship, so Christian artists must avoid this as well.

Some artists would claim that they are after realism. Realism is not an excuse that overcomes the problem that nudity is inappropriate. The problem here is a lack of imagination. Of course, Christian artists should portray all of the world, but can’t poverty be portrayed without nudity; can’t shame or vulnerability be shown without nudity? Even lust can be portrayed without uncovering the subject. The real questions is: Is this appropriate? If it is not, no appeal to realism can make it right.

Nudity crosses the line of privacy that each person should maintain. When you wake up in the morning—even if you are in a tropical climate—you put on some clothing before leaving the house. If you did not, your parents would, no doubt, have words with you. They should! Nudity is a level of vulnerability that should be protected and preserved for the marriage bed—which, of course, echoes our Edenic past, where nudity was appropriate, righteous, and shameless. Sadly, we are not in Eden now but in a fallen world—a world in which God commands that nudity be guarded, a world full of lust, a world in which people make gods out of images. As Christians and artists, we must use our imaginations, grasp our Bibles, and reject the use of nudity in artwork.

OPTIMAL ACTIVITY

Art Analysis

Edward Knippers is a nationally exhibited artist known as a figurative painter of biblical subjects. He has had over 100 one-man and invitational exhibitions, including a four-person show at the Los Angeles County Museum, and one-man shows at the Virginia Museum, Richmond, the University of Kentucky, Lexington, and the University of Oklahoma, Norman. Knippers’s work has been published widely, including by Life magazine
Subject Analysis

Read Matthew 4:1–11 and answer the following questions:

1. On what part of the account of Jesus’ temptation does this painting appear to be focusing?

   The painting captures Christ’s final response of “Away with you, Satan.”

2. How does Knippers convey the idea of a spiritual reality in the painting?

   The artist introduces cubist elements into the piece as a metaphor for the spiritual world. The cubism shows a world of different time and space, of a different reality. It is as real as our world, just different. The spiritual fight is real even if it is different than a fight in the real world. Satan is abstract not because he isn’t real but because what he does is illusionary. Satan temptations mischaracterize God and His Word and aim to pull Christ away from His mission of dying for the sins of His people.

3. Why is it significant that Christ is represented in the nude when the account in Scripture does not mention this?

   The painting is a poetic interpretation of the account of Christ’s temptation (the Bible doesn’t mention Satan having horns, either). Christ is the new Adam.

Content Analysis

Read Matthew 4:1–11 and answer the following questions:

1. What is the message of this work?

   We must flee temptation and the Devil. Temptation is real. Sin’s promises are illusionary—even if they appear more real and vibrant than the real world, as in this painting the “spiritual” side of the piece is richer and more enticing than the dry, boring real world’s wilderness.
ters Mary Cleophas and Mary Salome. The old man behind Jesus is Nicodemus, and in the gold robes is Joseph of Arimathea. Mary Magdalen is to the far right of the painting, indicated by one of the servants holding the jar that held the costly ointment with which she anointed the feet of Jesus.

**Technical Analysis**

1. Does this work demonstrate the artist's ability and expertise?
   Yes. It is a harmonious arrangement of ten figures in a confined space. It is also well crafted—it has held together for over five hundred years. His handling of anatomy and drapery is excellent.

2. Describe the piece.
   It is the removal of Jesus' body from the cross.

3. What is the element of the design which most attracts your gaze?
   Jesus' body and Mary's body are parallel. The shallow space in the composition causes the figures to spill out in to the viewer's space.

**Subject Analysis**

1. What moment of the biblical narrative does this depict?
   This is the moment when Christ's disciples and friends take his body down from the cross. He is surrounded by those closest to him. This is a time of great agony and uncertainty for his followers. John has begun to assume his role of watching over Mary in Jesus' absence.

2. What might be the significance of the skull at the bottom of the painting?
   The skull is for Golgotha (the "place of the skull") and also represents Adam's skull. Christ is the second Adam. The cross itself may point to Adam. According to "The Legend of the True Cross," which is part of Jacobus de Voragine's The Golden Legend, a late medieval collection of lore about the saints that inspired many works of art, the cross on which Christ was crucified and died was made from the tree grew on Adam's grave. This tree was grown from a seed from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil that St. Michael gave to Adam's son Seth. Centuries later it was chopped down and the trunk was thrown across a stream as a bridge. When the Queen of Sheba, on her way to visit Solomon, was about to step on the bridge, she received a divine message that the Savior would be crucified on a cross made from this wood. She told Solomon about her vision, and he tried to prevent the crucifixion by having the...
The reality he shows us is full of pathos; he is not content with merely recording the facts dispassionately like a reporter, but shows us flowing tears, quivering chins, wrung hands, furrowed brows, despondent gazes, and the exsanguinated, unconscious face of the mother of our Lord.

3. The Lamentation of Christ by Giotto reproduced earlier in this chapter, although depicting the same subject as van der Weyden’s piece, is very different in composition and feel. Identify some differences. Since the figures have halos, it puts a distance between the viewer and the characters, in spite of the extreme emotions exhibited in the piece. The angels in the sky make the event seem more “spiritual” than physical.

Content Analysis

1. What does van der Weyden accomplish by placing all of the action in a shallow space as opposed to a landscape?

In the same way that watching a movie in an Imax theater engages the viewer differently than watching the same event on a small television set, van der Weyden does not allow the reality of this story to fade into the background, but forces the viewer to confront it in his own space. The works of painter Edward Knippers, studied in the previous session, work in a similar way.

2. This image is supposed to be an Andachtsbild—a devotional or contemplative image to stir your heart and mind to love for God. What elements does the artist use to move the viewer in such a way?

The Deposition by Rogier van der Weyden (c. 1400–1464)
**Optional Session: Discussion**

**A Question to Consider**

Can Christians make images of things, of people and of God without creating idols?

John Calvin said, “The human heart is a factory of idols. . . . Every one of us is, from his mother’s womb, expert in inventing idols.” So the question might be better stated, is there anything Christians cannot turn into idols? Representational, two-dimensional and three-dimensional art is not the problem. Sinful hearts are the problem. Or, as Schaeffer says in chapter 1, “To worship art is wrong, but to make art is not.”

*From the General Information above, answer the following questions:*

**Text Analysis**

1. Which of the items in the following list are we forbidden to make an image of by the Second Commandment?

   BEAR  
   FLOWER  
   GOD  
   PEBBLE  
   LION  
   STAR  
   AUNT SARAH  
   JESUS

   This is a trick question—all of the items in the list may be reproduced in art. A very few Christians might claim that no images at all should be created. This, however, is an extreme position. Most believe that the bear, lion, flower, and star are good subjects for representational art. A slightly larger group in church history (represented today by some sects of Amish and Mennonite Christians) would not approve of any images of Aunt Sarah. Most Christians, however, have not seen the representation of humans as breaking the commandment. The Reformed churches have often objected to images of Christ and of God as a breaking of the Second Commandment. If, however, the commandment is about worship, as Schaeffer says, then images of Christ and God are not sinful unless and until people turn them into objects of worship. Images of God the Father and the Holy Spirit are more difficult—Jesus was a man, and therefore we can make more realistic images of Him. God the Father and the Holy Spirit are often easier to picture in symbols—like a dove or a tongue of fire.

2. How does Leviticus 26:1 help us to understand and interpret Exodus 20?

   Leviticus 26:1 says, “You shall not make idols for yourselves; neither a carved image nor a sacred pillar shall you rear up for yourselves; nor shall you set up an engraved stone in your land, to bow down to it; for I am the LORD your God.” This clarifies the commandment in Exodus 20 and shows that what is prohibited is the worship of art as representations of God or gods. Additionally, it would follow that worshiping art itself as God is also wrong.

3. What then does the Second Commandment actually forbid?

   The Second Commandment is against setting up or making anything to worship other than God. According to Question 108 in the Westminster Larger Catechism, this is so that Christians can receive, observe, and keep pure “all such religious worship and ordinances as God has instituted in his Word; particularly prayer and thanksgiving in the name of Christ; the reading, preaching, and hearing of the Word; the administration and receiving of the sacraments; church government and discipline . . .”

4. Reconsider the list in Question 1. Of which can we make representational artistic images?

   All of the items listed are available to the artist as subject matter without fear of breaking the Second Commandment. And all of these images can becomes idols if worshipped.

**Cultural Analysis**

1. What does our culture idolize? Does it guard the images of these idols carefully?

   Our culture idolizes sports, music, and film personalities. And yes, our culture guards these idols extremely carefully. These people have their likenesses plastered over tabloids and celebrity gossip magazines, but try to put the likeness of a teen heart throb or Hollywood’s “Lilith-du-jour” on a t-shirt and find out just how fast you will be sued.

   2. If you walk into any Christian bookstore (and many churches), you will see hundreds of images of Jesus. Do these images affect your relationship with Christ? Can these images be misleading?

   These images can be very misleading. They can not only adversely affect your relationship with Christ, but can also impact the theology and
growth of the church over generations. Popular images like Head of Christ by Warner Sallman have crippled generations of believers by reinforcing the heretical concept of an effeminate and weak Jesus. (To view this image click Link 1 for this chapter at www.VeritasPress.com/OmniLinks.) Parody items like the “Buddy Christ Bobble head” underscore the absurdity—and even the heresy—of much that passes for “art” in religious marketing centers, while reinforcing popular misconceptions of Christ.

3. Is it possible to worship in churches without using art? David Carson, an influential graphic designer of the 1990s, made a poster that said, “You cannot not communicate.” All church services are visual experiences. Many may say they do not use art in worship but then meet in spaces that could be mistaken for spaces of modern art. A big white box makes as much of a theological statement as the Sistine Chapel. A neon cross suspended between maps of the globe with pinpoints of light representing missionaries may not be good art, but it is an aesthetic experience that influences the way people worship God, and it shapes the theology of the Christians who meet there together.

Biblical Analysis

1. Can God use visual objects to represent Himself (Luke 22)?

During the Last Supper Christ established a perpetual visual representation for Himself that He insisted the Church use until the end of time. “And He took bread, gave thanks and broke it, and gave it to them, saying, ‘This is My body which is given for you; do this in remembrance of Me.’ Likewise He also took the cup after supper, saying, ‘This cup is the new covenant in My blood, which is shed for you.’”

2. Does Numbers 21 teach us that God can be represented by artwork, or is it, when considered with 2 Kings 18:4, a condemnation of idolatry?

Numbers 21 teaches that God can use art (in this case representational sculpture) for good and for His glory, while the passage from Second Kings reminds us how easily we twist good things into tools of sin and destruction.

SUMMA

Write an essay or discuss this question, integrating what you have learned from the material above.

Can anyone make an artistic representation of a Divine Being without falling into idolatry?

Clearly, fire can kill, and bronze serpents can be turned into idols. But fire can also cook food for the hungry, and bronze serpents can be instrumental in saving the dying in the wilderness. Visual representations of God can take people’s eyes off of real worship of the true God and lead to heretical ideas of God like “Buddy Christ.” But Bezalel was called by God to create representational art of spiritual, physical, and imaginary things for use in worship. And since Christ came in the flesh, we now have an incarnate faith that opens the way for more beauty made to the glory of God.

ENDNOTES