

Hanna Perez

Dr. Sharron Greaves

COM411 Faith, Film, and Culture

27 February 2023

Book Report: Introduction, Chapters 1-3

Introduction

1. How does your own faith affect the way you experience popular artwork?

The Bible is clear about everything that damages our hearts and our relationship with God just by allowing Him access to our eyes. Every year movies that are released push the line that separates the acceptable and the abhorrent. Today movies like Fifty Shades of Grey or Deadpool are celebrated and called good. I, as a Christian, who seeks to please my Savior and longs for what He longs for, find some discomfort with what the world calls good. It makes me sad, and I try to remove myself from its influence, making sure to choose wisely before saying yes to a movie. But a mistake here is to believe that avoiding graphic sex, immoderate violence, and profane language in movies somehow compensates for what I do choose to see. Avoiding these three factors does not necessarily relieve us of the responsibility to glorify God with our minds; let's be honest, no one goes to the movies with the desire to learn something that will shape our lives. We go to the movies instantly without really thinking. Our decisions have a lot to do with the intentions of our hearts and the state of our emotions in the present moment. I feel that discernment is a very important piece for me when it comes to movies because even when there is artwork that I find very interesting or even entertaining, I always think twice before I rush to say yes to something that can be detrimental to my

Christian life in the future because even though sometimes we don't believe it, even a small scene can affect us.

2. Given that we live in a media-saturated society, why is it important for people of faith to be discerning about perspectives represented in the entertainment media?

Our society is full of media choices. Everything we read, watch, listen to or interact with has an effect on us. Uplifting entertainment and healthy use of social media encourage good thoughts and righteous decisions and allow us to have fun and connect with others knowing that the Lord is happy about it. The use of harmful communication separates us from that because it harms us. Discernment is necessary to distinguish the good from the bad. God has a perfect plan for each of us; however, there are a multitude of options in front of us, and if we do not exercise good discernment, we run the risk of being "tossed back and forth by the waves and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming" (Ephesians 4:14).

3. The author suggests that "the popular arts reflect a society that they help to create." What do you think? Does the entertainment media reflect and/or shape society?

The media is a major force in modern culture. Many scholars say that we live in a culture in which the media both reflect and create culture. I personally believe that the media reflect versions of reality; by that, I mean that the media cut out portions of reality and re-present them to their audience. That re-presentation is not totally one hundred percent reality because the designation they make towards things is

never neutral, and the approach to reality is never impartial. The media are observers and, at the same time, narrators of facts, and in this way, it can be said that there is a "construction" of reality.

- 4. Think of a movie, television program, or song/music video that you really enjoyed. What made it enjoyable? To what extent did your appreciation have to do with whether or not it represented ideals, beliefs, or values that you support? Are there popular artworks you enjoy even if they don't seem to affirm your beliefs and values?**

For as long as I can remember, my favorite movie has been Mulan. I feel that from the first moment Mulan appears, it is very difficult not to identify with her, a young girl with few responsibilities who is unsure about what her future will be. Someone who feels she doesn't fit in with society and at the same time is forced to be part of it so as not to disappoint her family. This is a very important theme that is hardly seen in films in general. This film is a very religious film since it is about Chinese culture; it talks about the traditions they have, like the respect they have for their ancestors and how if you ask them to accompany you, they will be your spiritual guides —In this case, we have Mushu— and although this factor really abounds in the film, it never affected my ideals or beliefs. Mulan never called me to start believing in my ancestors or made me believe in Buddha or anything like that; in fact, it made me remember that what I believe in is what is true. I believe that when a person is firm in his beliefs, nothing will shake him, and that is important; we have to be sure of what we believe.

Chapter one

1. Discuss Amy Grant's "crossover" into the mainstream music market and the ensuing controversy among Christians.

Amy Grant began making her way in music by writing Christian songs that became very famous in the industry. As time went on, her lyrics went from being totally Christian to talking entirely about love, which created a lot of controversy in the Christian world. The faith community went crazy because after being proud of how well-received Christian music had been, they thought it was a massive betrayal of God to stop making those kinds of songs and go into secular music. Personally, I think there was nothing wrong with that, she is a singer dedicated to that life, and there is nothing wrong with starting to write other types of lyrics as long as they are not blasphemous or attack Christian values. Likewise, I understand why the Christian community reacted that way, but I think sometimes we get too legalistic and don't think gracefully. I am very sure that Jesus would never object to someone displaying their art, much less if He was the one who gave it to them.

2. Are all "family" films worth watching? If not, what separates worthwhile family films from those that are not?

In this media and entertainment-driven age, there is no shortage of things to watch. The choices of "family" movies are overwhelming. The sheer abundance alone makes the question, "should I watch this?" both urgent and overwhelming. For Christian viewers, it also involves moral and spiritual considerations. Today the family rating has changed a lot to what people considered family-friendly twenty years ago, so I can say that not all movies with that rating are worth watching.

Today's society forces movies to talk about homosexuality and bad acts as if it's something to celebrate, and if they don't have that, it's not family-friendly enough because it becomes homophobic or legalistic. What separates the fine line between what you should or shouldn't watch is, in my perspective, whom you watch it with and how firm on the fundamentals you are. My sister went to see a movie with her husband and kids a few weeks back and told me that they had to leave after twenty minutes because there was a homosexual scene that they didn't want their kids to see. I'm pretty sure that if my sister had only gone with her husband, there wouldn't have been a problem because they know that's wrong, but since they went with their kids and kids pick up very quickly what they interact with, they preferred to get out of there. It's really a matter of knowing if that's going to affect you or not.

3. Do you think Christians can or should make or watch R-rated films? Defend your answer.

The truth is that movies and television are popular because they have a unique narrative and visceral force. They have significant power to shape public opinion and personal morality. Among other things, the more we see certain behaviors, words, and worldviews on screens, the more relatable and acceptable they become to us. The immersive nature of images has great potential to generate empathy in us and also have the capacity to introduce those images and ideas deep inside us, for better or for worse. I personally believe that in this case, it is not a good thing because R-rated movies often include adult themes and activities, aggressive language, violence, nudity, drug abuse, etc., which are themes that, as

Christians, we should take very carefully because as humans we have the nature to generate ideas that sympathize with them quickly. Some will say that this is too much of a stretch, but in truth, there is a risk of thinking too much about the entertainment options too much but hardly at all about the witness we are giving.

4. Does removing objectionable content make a film better? Conversely, does including objectionable content make a film better?

I would definitely answer no to both. The key to being a great movie is simply the narrative, the actors, and the direction of it. While it is true that scenes are important, they are pre-fabricated when the script is being made, so it would be the screenwriter's fault if they add or subtract too much. If a movie is meant to be a horror movie, putting in sexual scenes would make no sense at all and would make it a bad movie, it really depends on what the goal of the movie is and how the director shapes it.

5. What, in your opinion, makes a popular artwork “Christian”?

To answer this, we have to go to our principles. The question I would ask myself would be, "What is it that identifies Christians?"

Christian identity is manifested in daily activities when it is given a place that Jesus defines for us. I learned in the theology classes our university gives us that the term "Christian" came into use when Luke wrote that this is what they called the disciples of Christ, that is, Jesus. The Bible is clear in what identifies Christians: they belong in His word (John 8:31-32), they are not part of the world (John 17:14), they have love for one another (John 13:34-35), they make His name known (John 17:6,26), and they spread the gospel (Matthew 24:14). Knowing this, it is easy to

determine what would make an artwork, "Christian." Glorifying God is the most important thing, and if a movie, song, or piece of art is looking for that as well, then it is definitely classifiable as Christian.

6. How does your Christian faith influence the way you watch movies, listen to music, and read books?

The truth is that it influences a lot but in an unconscious way. I can't say that I am constantly thinking about how listening to a specific song affects me and whether it glorifies God or not, likewise with movies or any form of art. It usually works this way, I listen to or watch something, and if I know ahead of time that it is going to contain something that I consider bad, I just don't watch or listen to it. Sometimes in the case of songs, I can't do that, so if while listening to them, I see that there are lyrics that don't go with what I think, I let them listen, although sometimes this is very difficult because they are usually very catchy and usually they are always on all the social networks which complicate the avoidance towards them.

7. Why do you think Christians are generally more attracted to mainstream films, music, radio, and TV than they are to "Christian" alternatives?

I think the main reason for this is that there are many more secular options than Christian ones. Every day there is a new secular song, movie, or musical play coming out, while the Christian comes out with less regularity which leaves us Christians with many secular options at our fingertips. For example, in today's Christian world, the phenomenon of the TV series "The Chosen" has emerged, and despite the fact that it does not follow the life of Jesus to the letter as in the bible, I think for many Christians, it has been very good, and much we enjoy them

because it preserves a most essential part of Jesus' life on earth, but it just finished season three a week ago, and now we have no choice but to (1) watch it again or (2) watch whatever else is posted on Netflix, the second option being the easiest and most entertaining. Another factor is that secular stuff fills all media. We are constantly exposed to watching secular stuff on our cell phones twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. TikTok is the social network with the most usage at the moment, and as a consumer of this social network, I am tempted to watch the series they recommend for the simple fact that during the day probably, a similar TikTok about that series will come up every five minutes, it is as if the algorithm of these social networks seek to make you consume this content compulsorily.

- 8. An observer of British culture contended that many Christians “look at culture more positively and testify to feeling more stimulation—even spiritual stimulation—from ‘secular’ sources than they do from sources within the evangelical sub-culture.” Is this consistent with your own experience? Explain.**

As I said in previous questions, being immersed in so many secular things in our daily lives makes us respond to them naturally and unconsciously. Personally, although I wouldn't like it, I feel it's totally true. I consider myself a person who consumes a lot of music and lately I have been listening to genres that I don't usually listen to just because TikTok hasn't stopped suggesting me those kinds of songs that don't contain very good lyrics, but the stimulus they make me feel is really positive. Another thing that I find very curious is that in TikTok I also get many videos that are spiritual -not Christian, I mean other types of religions- which

at first I refused to watch completely, but which today I do not hesitate to finish watching until the last second, not because I believe in that, just that I find it entertaining, which somehow or other speaks of the acceptance it has had with me.

Chapter two

1. What is culture, and why is it important for Christians to think of themselves as cultural agents or stewards in God's creation?

Culture is a collection of ideals and beliefs, values and assumptions, which forms a kind of master plan for living and interpreting life. Culture involves both creating meanings for things and living according to those meanings; it shapes experience and expectations and provides us with a means of coping with the new and unexpected. According to the Bible, culture is a gift directly from God, a religious duty, and an obligation. As Christians, we have a rich heritage of faith, tradition, and social teaching to draw upon in our quest to live the gospel in our time. As a community of faith, we seek to protect the life and dignity of every person, care for the vulnerable and preserve our home for our children and future generations. It is important that, as Christians, we consider ourselves stewards of God's creation because that is what we have been entrusted to do. Some Christians think that we should only be concerned about the spiritual health of the world; that as long as we have salvation in Christ, what happens to God's creation while we await Christ's return is unimportant. But the Bible indicates that Christ seeks to redeem the whole earth, not just our souls. We, as Christians, cannot sit back and do nothing while God's creation is being damaged under our watch. Creation is for God's glory and human beings have been given a special responsibility to care for God's creation. Destruction of creation not only endangers life, including human life on this planet; it is also a sin against God.

2. How should this biblical understanding of culture and stewardship affect the way we think about the popular arts and culture?

How should a Christian approach art in order to evaluate it? Is beauty simply "in the eye of the beholder"? Or are there biblical guidelines that provide a framework for the evaluation and enjoyment of art? The answer is probably to be found in Philippians 4. While the biblical context of this passage goes beyond aesthetics, in this passage (and by way of application) we are given, in a categorical way, some necessary criteria for artistic analysis. Each concept that Paul mentions in verse 8 can be used as a kind of "key" to unlock the significance of the art we encounter and appreciate it authentically. (1) Truth: the Christian is forced to ask: "Is this really true? Does life really operate in this way, in light of God's revelation?" And Christians must remember that truth involves sincerely facing the negative as well as the positive aspects of reality. Negative content has its place, even in a Christian approach to art. But Christian hope allows us to see these works from another perspective. We grieve, but not as those who have no hope. Our sorrow is one of ultimate expectation and triumph; there is another sorrow that is one of pessimism and utter despair. (2) Purity: this key also refers to morality, contrasting what is innocent, chaste, and pure from what is sordid, impure, and worldly. An accurate application of the principle will help distinguish one from the other. (3) Pleasantness: Again, the Christian is equipped to appreciate a wide range of artistic media and expressions. If there is little to evaluate morally and rationally, we are still free to appreciate what is beautiful in art.

3. That all things are intended for service in God's worlds is a central motif in scripture. How might this idea affect the way we think about symbolizing and engaging culture?

Solomon is one of my favorite biblical authors, I think the amount of wisdom that God gave him when he asked for it was incredible. In Proverbs 16:4, it says, "The Lord has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble." I feel that precisely this verse answers this question. Everything serves God, even the wicked, even if it is strange to understand. With this in mind, I believe that we should not let our guard down and give up but rather seek to fulfill that purpose. Our culture is that of the kingdom, and if we want the kingdom of heaven to come to earth, we have to make it possible by helping to extend the kingdom in the area we are in, whether it be art, music, science, etc.

4. Name some ways you can actively and intentionally fulfill the cultural mandate as an individual and as a community.

God took a culture, which is not ours, but one from the days of Moses to John of Patmos in Revelation. There are almost 1500 years of history, where a parenthesis was made in eternity, and in this lapse of time, the book was written, which would serve all the generations that are on earth to understand the Kingdom so that we understand our culture. To make the culture of the Kingdom evident, the principle of obedience is essential, which demands a non-negotiable faith, something that Christ presented to his followers. When the Bible speaks of obedience, it refers firstly to God and secondly to the men He has placed in the family, church, and nation as His representative authorities. Everyone who knows and practices

obedience and subjection is ready to make God's government or His Kingdom a reality in his life. A healthy and true subordination means that we recognize that there is someone, who is above us, to whom we must be submitted by obedience and by the authority he has over us. I believe that with that as a foundation we fulfill our mandate to maintain culture.

Chapter three

1. What kinds of things (upbringing, church, events, books, experiences, others) have shaped the development of your cultural orientation?

I was born into a Christian family, and I feel totally blessed for that. My parents are the people who have influenced me the most in my life because since I was little, I saw them love God with all their hearts and obey Him. I have known many pastors throughout my life, but never a couple like my parents; they have made decisions that I know were only out of obedience to God because if not, no one would have made them. They also took me to church as a child, where I became friends with people who were also very grounded in the faith. And at times in my adolescence, they never forced me to believe in God; they let me experience my own relationship with Him, but one thing they did was to always pray for me so that I would personally know this Christ that they knew. That formed me. If today I have a culture, it is because all this happened while I was growing up, and they never left me alone. My culture was to look through the eyes of Jesus, through the eyes of my parents. Even in crucial moments when I wanted to rebel, the values that were so instilled in me made me not do things that I would probably regret today, and that is something I am really proud of.

2. Discuss reasons why people of a common faith might have different views on social, political, economic, or aesthetic issues in life.

Most of us believe that we can change what others think; otherwise, we would not spend so much time in life thinking about "what others think of us" and trying to improve their judgment of us. Wanting to be right is a chronic disease of mankind,

surely one of the causes that have most confronted people, nations, and organized religions of the planet. To have opinions is normal, also to have tastes and preferences... Each person creates his own sense of the world based on his life history, which is unique and unrepeatable. As Christians, we differ from others by our way of being, by our physique, expressions, culture, and customs, and of course, because we think differently, we have different experiences, we come from different places and contexts that create our culture and our beliefs, and it is not bad as long as we respect everyone's ideas, even if we do not share them.

3. Consider other films that adhere to the same rags-to-riches formula as Rocky and Erin Brockovich. How are they different and yet the same (e.g., character and setting)?

The only movie that comes to mind right now that has a similar style to Rocky and Erin Brockovich is probably Captain America. I am a total marvel movie nerd, and when I saw this movie, I came out thinking that I should be the next person they should try that magic serum on. One thing this movie is similar to the aforementioned movies is that it has an ideological explanation. For starters, he represents civic republican values, as he defends freedom of speech, citizens' rights, and democracy against big corporations and powerful villains while respecting their lives and right to a fair trial at all times. When he has to choose between freedom and security, rights and freedoms always come first. Captain America, at the end of all the movies, ends up being the perfect hero, and some end up deifying him. For example, in the movie Civil War, from my perspective, Team Iron Man was much more right, but most people thought that Captain

America was right just because he was him. Captain America represents the change, the power, and the strength that someone can have, and that impacts a lot on the generations, especially the young ones.

4. While this will be treated in later chapters, give some thought to how a Christian perspective might contribute to your engagement with popular art—both in terms of production and criticism.

I believe that as Christians, we can show the fruit of the Spirit but be largely devoid of cultural and aesthetic sensibilities. D. L. Moody is said to have "murdered the king's language (English) " but was used mightily by God on two continents. This suggests that cultural sophistication is not absolutely necessary for God to use a person for spiritual purposes, but one might well think about how many ministry opportunities have been lost because a person made a cultural or artistic "misstep." The other side of the coin is that a person may have reached the pinnacle of cultural and aesthetic approval but have no spiritual impact whatsoever on his or her surroundings.

There are three important words to keep in mind when defining Christian responsibility in art and criticism. The first is cooperation. The reason for this cooperation is so that we can identify with our art so that it can be influenced for Jesus Christ. Jesus is a model for us in this. He was not, in general, a non-conformist. He attended weddings and funerals, synagogues and feasts. He was not a practicing Jew. He generally did things that were culturally acceptable. When he did not, it was because of clear spiritual principles.

A second word is persuasion. The Bible describes Christians as salt and light, the penetrating and purifying elements within a culture. Christianity seeks to have a sanctifying influence on art and not to be absorbed by repeatedly compromising.

A third concept is confrontation. By careful use of the Bible, Christians can challenge and reject those elements and practices within the art that are incompatible with biblical truth. There are times when Christians must confront society. Such things as polygamy, idolatry, sexual immorality, and racism must be challenged head-on by Christians.

5. What are some prominent American ideals, beliefs, and values? Can you find them represented in popular artworks?

I am not an American citizen, but throughout my time here, I have been able to see how some values stand out in this community. Independence and self-reliance definitely take the top spot. Americans value their freedom to live their lives with limited government intervention and control. This sense of independence motivates the importance of self-determination. Americans take great pride in being self-sufficient and able to take care of themselves. They tend to think that others should also be self-sufficient. Individualism is another very remarkable value. It allows you to do whatever you want as long as you don't affect other people's rights. Americans should have the freedom to make their own decisions and control their own lives. Americans like to express themselves and do not feel obligated to agree with others. They generally want to be seen as unique. Finally, I would say that privacy is something Americans value highly. Many Americans like to have time to themselves away from others. They may be secretive about certain

topics, such as their age, salary, or where they live. This is reflected in different art forms, especially movies. I think the movie that best fits these previously mentioned things is Citizen Kane; this is not only the best movie in cinema but also the one that best represents American values in a single character.