

Eyes Wide Open

Chapter 8

1. Discuss ways the mapped out in this chapter can be used to evaluate popular artworks.

The Christian cultural landscape is a map of reality artists, critics, and patrons use to engage with popular art. These fundamental faith beliefs provide a framework for a Christian cultural landscape, which includes God's work in the world, believing people inhabit this landscape, faith is integral to life, human sin is accurate, and God offers forgiveness and redemption. These beliefs shape the contours of the landscape, representing what it is like to live in God's good but fallen world. The Christian cultural landscape includes images and metaphors of chaos, justice, pain, suffering, and alienation, all part of living in a fallen world.

2. As Christians, can we take spiritual implications out of “spiritual” depictions—like the Force in Star Wars, for example—as a reference to Christianity? Are we justified in doing so?

Yes, we are justified in doing this. Artists who create these spiritual depictions do this so we can feel a sense of God. The adage "Coincidence is God's way of remaining anonymous" captures the difficulty of identifying a spiritual influence as God's handiwork. This is why some Christian artists are attracted to fantasy and science fiction genres. I also feel the popular arts show us the meaning of things, or their purpose in God's kingdom, by helping us articulate our experiences for a deeper understanding of life.

3. What makes movies with strong villains, like *The Silence of the Lambs* or *Basic Instinct*, so appealing—even to Christians?

Popular artworks have shown that evil has a certain appeal, but Christian faith perspectives must be honest about sin and not glorify it. Instead, they must go into the shadows to bring our fallenness to light. These insights into human nature can impact the story and characterization in ways that affirm Christian beliefs and assumptions.

4. The author argues, “An honest artistic representation of God’s world in popular art will include images and metaphors of chaos, injustice, pain, suffering, and alienation, for they are all part of living in a fallen world.” But many Christians avoid and criticize such depictions in popular art. If we live in a fallen world, how can we make the conflict between good and evil real?

Christians need not shy away from the reality of evil in favor of sentimentalism. Still, a difficulty for artists is to treat the ugliness, brutality, and meanness of sinful humanity without falling into the gratuitous and exploitative depictions that characterize many productions. Popular art should not be more straightforward than the reality it attempts to represent, and the critical issues are how the artist depicts sin and the perspective the artist gives to the events. Artists can make the conflict between good and evil real by establishing an attitude towards the characters they have created, their actions, and the issues they deal with. Christian insights on the nature of good and evil and the workings of the human mind can give a spiritual dimension to famous artworks.

5. Why do people—Christians included—want, even demand, happy endings? What should we make of our cultural obsession with living happily ever after?

We all want a happy ending, especially Christians, due to our denial of being less than perfect.

When we experience unhappy endings, we must look at and feel the sadness in our lives. People

who go to the movies want to be entertained and leave happy; Christians have a more challenging time with this. As our text explains, many Christians want to appear holy and righteous, believing that a trouble-free life is a better testimony to God and a better witness to their neighbors. This kind of Christianity "blinds itself to pain and thereby makes a falsehood of its praise. Minimizing the depth of sin reduces the height of God's grace.

Happiness is an inside job. No thing or person can make us genuinely happy. We live in a material world. We seek the outside. We look for external things to make us happy. I think we forgot that to feel happiness, ultimately, we need to be in a relationship with God. Live a virtuous life the best we can; I know this is the way to happiness. But most people don't want to accept this because it takes work, commitment, and faith. Everyone wants a quick fix. There is no more delaying gratification; Amazon has made this possible. I researched happiness and found over 40,000 books to find happiness and 75 million searches on happiness on Google search. Get closer to God, do a random act of kindness each day, and love one another the best we can. This will bring happiness.

Chapter 9

1. How should Christians respond to melodrama? Explain why the melodramatic vision runs against the grain of the central tenets of the Christian faith.

Christians should respond to melodrama through scripture.

Melodramatic vision runs against the grain of the central tenets of the Christian faith by the way it looks at the world in black and white. Another way it runs against the grain is that it oversimplifies sin and sees redemption as getting it from some outside assistance. It is the assertion of a harmony of interests on a social basis that cannot overcome the reality of human conflict of affairs in life that result in sin. People believe they can find their way back to a pure existence. As Christians, we know this can only happen when Christ returns. Lastly, melodrama gives an exaggerated stance on emotion. This is most prevalent in fear and sympathy, making it about human feelings and not scriptural principles.

2. What are the essential characteristics of classical Hollywood films? How might these features work against portrayals of a Christian cultural landscape?

Hollywood films represent a general cultural orientation, a system of meanings and values related to the individual hero, religion, gender roles, sex, violence, and materialism. The characteristics of Hollywood film work against the Christian cultural landscape because they don't include God's work or scriptural principles. Additionally, they don't represent what it is like to live in God's good but fallen world.

3. To what extent do you think people believe they should be healthy, wealthy, and successful because they deserve it for being "good"?

I don't think people should believe this way. I feel that being good is something we should all do regardless. Deserving health, wealth, and success as a reward for being good is a bit unrealistic.

Life is life, and some things happen, so the best thing we can expect is to enjoy a good, healthy, and able to pay for shelter and be faithful that God will take care of you and your family and give us strength when hardships come about.

4. The author maintains that “the cultural landscape of the Hollywood film exaggerates individualism, favoring individual over corporate or institutional solutions to problems and conflicts.” How might such portrayals distort our understanding of similar events in the real world?

The emphasis on the individual corresponds to a need for more trust in institutions. Also, it downplays the role of external forces in shaping human beings and impacting the course of events and even history. God does not call us to be self-reliant individualists, isolated or alone, but to be community members. Scripture presents us as individuals gifted by God to contribute to the "common good" and seek the kingdom of God and his righteousness. We are to live in relationships with others, be accountable to God and be responsible to one another. Popular artworks extolling these values resonate with a Christian cultural landscape. They can help us to see more clearly as individuals, groups, and communities trying to find their way in contemporary society.

5. Generate a list of movies and consider ways they affirm or oppose the themes highlighted in this chapter—the classical Hollywood formula, melodrama, self-reliant individualism, religion, and materialism.

The Rocky series affirms self-reliant individualism. Balboa felt it was him against the world for his self-respect.

Love Story is a film filled with melodrama and self-reliant individualism. The couple comes from different worlds, but despite the family's opposition to their relationship, they take off and get married without their approval.

Fried Green Tomatoes is another film fueled with melodrama and without religion. An unhappy housewife befriends an older woman in a nursing home and escapes from her depressing world through the stories of the people she used to know.

6. How does the general treatment of materialism in the Hollywood landscape compare with a Christian understanding of wealth and poverty?

Hollywood promotes quick fixes, easy money, buying religion, and the rags to riches thinking. Work hard, and you, too, can be rich. Never put their shoes on people with low incomes or the reality of it all. Money is, and consumption is their God. In Christian understanding, Apostle Paul's letter to Timothy shows how a faith orientation shapes attitudes and behavior related to the pursuit of wealth and the possession of material things. He warns that those who trust these things are on a path of destruction that can lead to losing faith. This is because materialism cannot meet our emotional and social needs and cannot substitute for trust in God.

7. As Christians, what should we make of the assumptions about materialism prevalent in Hollywood films?

Scripture warns against materialism as a means of salvation. Therefore, people of faith should guard against the secular desire to make consumption an idol. Instead, we should act kindly to the poor and confront unjust laws and social patterns that cause poverty. Popular artworks that

deal with these issues show that they are significant and deserving of our attention, both personally and collectively.

Chapter 10

1. Describe gender stereotypes prevalent in films, TV programs, and music videos, and evaluate them from your Christian perspective.

Hollywood's stereotype of the ideal male is seen as a virile, strong, unrestrained, and unattached man of action and adventure. At the same time, his shadow is the "settled husband/father, dependable but dull." These images associate masculinity with muscles, emotional restraint, dominance, aggression, and the capacity for violence. The ideal male is seen as a virile, strong, unrestrained, and unattached man of action and adventure, while his shadow is the "settled husband/father, dependable but dull." The female is the stereotyped mainstay of hearth and home" who stands in contrast to her shadow. This woman is "erotic... fascinating but dangerous." Women are represented in ways that define them by their sexuality and their appearance and are to be "overtly sexy and attractive but essentially passive and virginal." Even though ideals and attitudes have changed, whatever new conceptions of women have emerged still find representation primarily within traditional gender categories. Women "have long been divided into virgins and whores."

On the other hand, the Christian perspective views men and women through scripture. God commands man and woman to work together to cultivate the creation and advance of the kingdom. The woman described in Proverbs 31 is capable, caring, and morally upright, with business acumen. She deserves love, honor, and respect; her beauty and value lie in her integrity,

character, strength, and faithfulness. Ecclesiastes made it clear that wisdom is better than weapons of war. Christians are expected to exhibit the fruit of the Spirit, such as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. People gifted by God have a wide range of talents to be used in the service of their neighbor.

Scripture informs us that people gifted by God have a wide range and diversity of talents to be used in service of our neighbor (1 Cor. 12:14–26).

2. “While Christians do well to recoil from our culture’s obsession with sex,” the author contends, “we should not abandon it as a topic for artistic treatment or criticism.” Is there a proper place for the erotic in popular art? If so, how should it appear in a Christian cultural landscape?

When put in a proper context scripture affirms and encourages sex as a celebration of human love and marriage, a good gift from God that can be playful and exciting, wonderful and mysterious, and an ecstatic enjoyment of human love. Sex allows humans to reach a level of intimacy that can be mysterious and even in some sense spiritual, and scripture likens the covenantal relationship between God and the church to a marriage (Isa. 62:5; Rev. 21:1).

Erotic depictions do not have to be voyeuristic—a temptation always to be resisted—but can be put in a proper context to engage the audience at the level of meaning. Instead of simply condemning erotic elements, our critique should be directed toward the artist’s treatment and an understanding and evaluation of their inclusion in the artwork.

3. Spend some time talking about a Christian perspective on sex

As a Christian, God created sex, which is good and excellent. He made it for us to make babies for pleasure and satisfaction. He designed men's and women's bodies to complement each other. God made all these beautiful purposes to be contained in marriage—a covenant of faithfulness between husband and wife. Many Christians feel God pardons the living together arrangement if you and your partner are committed. I am on the fence about this. I know I have been guilty, but this is not a Christian perspective on marriage. I am no longer living this way, but I know many good Christians that do.

4. Can you think of a popular film that treats sex appropriately?

I haven't watched many films in the last few years, but the ones I can recall are older films. For example, when a couple is about to make love, in the old films, they would either go into their bedroom, or the lights would go down, and the viewer would use their imagination.

Chapter 11

1. What place does violence hold in American mythology and Hollywood?

How should we think about this as Christians?

Violence is a mainstay in American entertainment. In addition, violence is central to American mythology as a means of justice and retribution.

Christians must develop tools for analyzing popular art and culture to reduce the risk of cultural accommodation.

2. How is violence in the Bible different from the violence we see in Hollywood films?

Even though the Bible explores the whole range of human depravity, the stories are always told with a certain perspective. The Bible does not overlook or excuse the evil it depicts; it shows evil and depravity as real but at odds with the best human experience. There are emotional and social consequences for our actions, and people are morally responsible for their evil acts. On the other hand, Hollywood films contain horrific scenes of violence and rape that, while difficult to watch, reveal the depth of evil that has taken place and that these characters are struggling with. Most films and television programs make violence seem more common than it is and create the impression that it is the best way of solving disputes. Instead, this film treats violence as an invasion in everyday life and investigates the consequences.

3. Can you think of famous artworks that treat violence appropriately?

I think the Marvel movies treat violence appropriately. I feel that because their target audience is children and adults, they do a good job with all the violence in their movies.

4. Is violence artistically necessary? Can art do without it?

To some extent, I feel violence is necessary for popular artworks. I don't believe we can do without it because popular artworks explore human situations and can help us come to terms with emotional trials that might occur in real life. A host of factors, including age, gender, and viewing skills, among others, influence individual responses to popular artworks. Judgments about the appropriateness of depictions of violence are grounded in life perspectives.