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CLASSICS



# Art and the Bible

*Two Essays*



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FOREWORD BY MICHAEL CARD



IVP Books

An imprint of InterVarsity Press  
Downers Grove, Illinois

InterVarsity Press

P.O. Box 1400, Downers Grove, IL 60515-1426

World Wide Web: [www.ivpress.com](http://www.ivpress.com)

E-mail: [email@ivpress.com](mailto:email@ivpress.com)

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Design: Cindy Kiple

Images: Scala/Art Resource, NY

ISBN-10: 0-8308-3401-X

ISBN-13: 978-0-8308-3401-3

Printed in the United States of America ∞

#### Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Schaeffer, Francis A. (Francis August)

[Art in the Bible]

Art and the Bible / Francis A. Schaeffer.

p. cm.

ISBN-13: 978-0-8308-3401-3 (pbk.: alk. paper)

ISBN-10: 0-8308-3401-X (pbk.: alk. paper)

1. Arts in the Bible. 2. Christianity and art. I. Schaeffer, Francis A. (Francis August). Some perspectives on art. II. Title.

BS680.A77533 2007

246—dc22

2006030468

P	16	15	14	13	12	11	10	9	8	7	6	5	4	3	2	1
Y	19	18	17	16	15	14	13	12	11	10	09	08	07	06		

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ONE

# Art in the Bible



What is the place of art in the Christian life? Is art—especially the fine arts of painting and music—simply a way to bring in worldliness through the back door? We know that poetry may be used to praise God in, say, the psalms and maybe even in modern hymns. But what about sculpture or drama? Do these have any place in the Christian life? Shouldn't a Christian focus his gaze steadily on "religious things" alone and forget about art and culture?

## THE LORDSHIP OF CHRIST

As evangelical Christians we have tended to relegate

art to the very fringe of life. The rest of human life we feel is more important. Despite our constant talk about the lordship of Christ, 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.

The lordship of Christ over the whole of life means that there are no platonic areas in Christianity, no dichotomy or hierarchy between the body and the soul. God made the body as well as the soul and redemption is for the whole man. Evangelicals have been legitimately criticized for often being so tremendously interested in seeing souls get saved and go to heaven that they have not cared much about the whole man.

The Bible, however, makes four things very clear: (1) God made the whole man, (2) in Christ the whole man is redeemed, (3) Christ is the Lord of the whole man now and the Lord of the whole Christian life, and (4) in the future as Christ comes back, the body will be raised from the dead and the whole

man will have a whole redemption. It is within this framework that we are to understand the place of art in the Christian life. Therefore, let us consider more fully what it means to be a whole man whose whole life is under the lordship of Christ.

The conception of the wholeness of man and the lordship of man over creation comes early in Scripture. In Genesis 1:26-27, we read, "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the heavens, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creepeth upon the earth. And God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them." From the very beginning, therefore, man and woman, being created in the image of God (both of them!), were given dominion (lordship) over the whole of the created earth. They were the ones who bore the image of God and, bearing that image, they were to be in charge, to tend the garden, to keep it and preserve it before their own Lord. Of course, that dominion was spoiled by the historic, space-time Fall, and there-

fore it is no longer possible to maintain that dominion in a perfect fashion.

Yet, when a man comes under the blood of Christ, his whole capacity as man is refashioned. His soul is saved, yes, but so are his mind and body. As Christians we are to look to Christ day by day, for Christ will produce his fruit through us. True spirituality means the lordship of Christ over the total man.

There have been periods in the past when Christians understood this better than we have in the last few decades. A few years ago when I started to work out a Christian epistemology and a Christian concept of culture, many people considered what I was doing suspect. They felt that because I was interested in intellectual answers I must not be biblical. But this attitude represents a real poverty. It fails to understand that if Christianity is really true, 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.

The ancients were afraid that if they went to the

end of the earth they would fall off and be consumed by dragons. But once we understand that Christianity is true to what is there, true to the ultimate environment—the infinite, personal God who is really there—then our minds are freed. We can pursue any question and can be sure that we will not fall off the end of the earth. Such an attitude will give our Christianity a strength that it often does not seem to have at the present time.

But there is another side to the lordship of Christ, and this involves the total culture—including the area of creativity. Again, evangelical or biblical Christianity has been weak at this point. About all that we have produced is a very romantic Sunday school art. We do not seem to understand that the arts too are supposed to be under the lordship of Christ.

I have frequently quoted a statement from Francis Bacon who was one of the first of the modern scientists and who believed in the uniformity of natural causes in an open system.

He, along with other men like Copernicus and Galileo, believed that because the world had been created by a reasonable God they could therefore



pursue the truth of the universe by reason. There is much, of course, in Francis Bacon with which I would disagree, but one of the statements which I love to quote is this: "Man by the Fall fell at the same time from his state of innocence and from his dominion over nature. Both of these losses, however, can even in this life be in some part repaired; the former by religion and faith, the latter by the arts and sciences." How I wish that evangelical Christians in the United States and Britain and across the world had had this vision for the last fifty years!

The arts and the sciences do have a place in the Christian life—they are not peripheral. For a Christian, redeemed by the work of Christ and living within the norms of Scripture and under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, the lordship of Christ should include an interest in the arts. A Christian should use these arts to the glory of God, not just as tracts, mind you, but as things of beauty to the praise of God. An art work can be a doxology in itself.

Nonetheless, while the concept of the lordship of Christ over the whole world would seem to include the arts, many Christians will respond by saying that