

This Page:
 Perspectives on Film

- | [Need for Christian Interpretation](#)
- | ["Weaker Brother" Considerations](#)
- | [Summary](#)

Mind Games Survival Course Manual



Table of Contents

Perspectives on Film

What's in a movie?

Todd Kappelman

V. The Need For Christian Interpretation

A. *Literary [and, by extension, film] criticism should be completed by criticism from a definite ethical and theological standpoint.*

. . . What I believe to be incumbent upon all Christians is the duty of maintaining consciously certain standards and criteria of criticism over and above those applied by the rest of the world; and that by these criteria and standards everything . . . must be tested. It is necessary for the Christian readers [again, by extension, the Christian movie-goer] to scrutinize their reading [film], especially of works of imagination, with explicit ethical and theological standards (T.S. Eliot, *Religion and Literature*).

2. **Leland Ryken proposes that the Christian ask three questions when interpreting a work of art** (Ryken has in mind literature and the classical visual arts, but film may again be included in this list. See *The Liberated Imagination*)

1. Does the interpretation of reality in this work conform or fail to conform to Christian doctrine or ethics? (The answer may be mixed for a given work.)
2. If some of the ideas and values are Christian, are they inclusively or exclusively Christian? That is, do these ideas encompass Christianity and other religions or philosophic viewpoints, or do they exclude Christianity from other viewpoints?

3. If some of the ideas and values in a work are Christian, are they a relatively complete version of the Christian view, or are they a relatively rudimentary version of Christian belief on a given topic?
- 3. *Some cautionary measures should also apply to doing any kind of critical work.***
1. Do not make evaluations that label a work "Christian" or "non-Christian" for purposes of approval or disapproval. This is at best shallow, and at worst trite and ridiculous. It reinforces many of the stereotypes people have about Christians and perpetuates the idea that Christians are unable to offer deep and thoughtful insights about art and culture.
 2. Know the audience to whom your critical remarks will be addressed. A Christian speaking to other believers may be able to offer different insights based upon a shared knowledge. Likewise, the aspect of the film which is most important to a non-believer may differ from that which the believer regards as most important.
 3. Be careful not to allow your personal perspective to dominate the description of a particular work. Try to understand how the work is applicable to the widest possible audience.
 4. Do not expect a non-Christian to agree with you, arrive at the same conclusions, or completely understand your perspective. At best one can hope to offer a clear and coherent insight into a work and thereby gain an opportunity for a Christian voice to be heard. In a market place of ideas Christians should expect, at best, to be allowed to voice their opinions.

Conclusion: Film is a shared medium of artistic exchange involving the film's creators, the audience, and the reality portrayed. The subject matter, and the manner of presentation an artist chooses, shows a great deal about what he or she believes to be important and significant as well as their interpretation of reality (i.e. their philosophical persuasion.)

6. "Weaker Brother" Considerations

A. *I Corinthians chapter 8 contains Paul's great teaching concerning meat sacrificed to idols and the relationship of stronger and weaker Christians to one another.*

1. The emphasis of responsibility is clearly on the stronger brother. It is this person who should be more mature spiritually and he/she who should have the interest of the weaker brother in mind.
2. Exercising rampant Christian freedom does not necessarily mean one is a strong Christian. It could indicate that one is too weak to control one's passions and is hiding behind the argument that they are a stronger brother. Examine and reexamine your motives continually!

3. Do not urge others to participate in something that you, as a Christian, feel comfortable doing if they have reservations. You may inadvertently cause the other person to sin. Remember the rule of Augustine: "Love God with all of your heart, and do as you please!" This great advice will help keep the Christian's behavior from being excessive and causing others to stumble.



2. *There are basically three positions related to Christians viewing film.*

1. *Prohibition.* This is the belief that films, and often television and other forms of entertainment, are inherently evil and detrimental to the Christian's spiritual well being. Persons who maintain this position avoid all film, regardless of the rating or reputed benefits, and urge others to do the same.
2. *Abstinence.* This is the belief that it is permissible for Christians to view films, but for personal reasons this person does not choose to do so. This may be for reasons ranging from a concern for the use of time or no real desire to watch film to avoidance because it may cause them or someone they are concerned about to stumble. Willingly abstaining from some or all films does not automatically make one a weaker brother and this charge should be avoided!
3. *Moderation.* This is the belief that it is permissible to watch films and that one may do so within a certain framework of moderation. This person willingly views some films but considers others to be inappropriate for Christians. There is a great deal of disagreement here about what a Christian can or cannot, and should or should not watch. (Again, see Augustine's rule from A.3. above.)

Summary

There is a valid history of concern about Christian involvement in the arts and fictional and imaginative literature which presently manifests itself in the form of concerns about Christians who view film. However, because film is one of the dominant mediums of cultural expression, film criticism is necessary and if Christians do not make their voices heard then others, often non-Christians, will dominate the discussion. All films contain the philosophical persuasions of the persons who contribute to their development, and it is the job of the critic to make insightful, fair, and well-informed evaluations of the work. Not everyone feels comfortable in viewing some (or any) films and the Christian should be especially mindful of the beliefs of others and always have the interest of fellow believers as well as nonbelievers in mind.

©1998 Probe Ministries

 [Table of Contents](#) 



[Return to](#) [Probe Home](#)