

Title – An Affirmation of Literature in the Christian Life

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Abstract:

The place of literature in the daily life of a Christian is oft debated in the Church. Some Christians believe that we should refrain from all non-biblical literature, although this stance is a minority one. Much more common in the Church, however, is the conception that literature, the writing or reading of it, is morally neutral, neither good nor bad. The assumption is that if a Christian wants to read or write literature, then doing so is fine, but Christians who believe this way do not recognize literature as having any sort of value or worth in the Christian life. The argument of this paper is that literature is in fact a moral good and belongs in the life of a Christian. This argument is supported by contributions of numerous reputable philosophers who are known for their work in the field of aesthetics, including ancient philosophers like Aristotle and Horace and more modern scholars like Jacques Maritain, Roger Scruton, and James K. A. Smith. Theologians Francis Schaeffer, St. Augustine of Hippo, and St. Thomas Aquinas were also consulted during the writing process. The ideas of renowned communications theorist Walter Fisher were also heavily researched, given literature's rhetorical function and the

Fisher's focus on narrative. The most important influence on the paper is Sir Philip Sidney and his *Defence of Poetry*, to which this paper owes much of its thesis. The thesis of the paper is that a biblical view of literature affirms its value and that literature delights, teaches, and moves man by the way literature engages the whole of his being—body, mind, and spirit. The paper specifically attributes beauty and narrative as sources for literature's benefits and explains how both beauty and narrative affect man's being in its entirety.

This paper primarily concerns itself with the value of literature, the benefits of literature, and qualifications for good literature. Within these parameters, the paper does address literature that might share values that are antithetical to Christian values, and it draws upon John Milton's claim that such literature, by teaching the knowledge of evil, can move one towards a more virtuous life. Future research should be done on the question of simply "bad" literature. Is there any value in reading dime store romances, for instance? What about in regards to *The Shack*, which many might argue is both bad theology and bad literature? The research in this paper can contribute to these discussions and at the very least causes the reader to think about the issues, but more research is needed to arrive at a fully developed conclusion.