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Imagine: A Vision For Christians In The Arts



Synopsis

Imagine art that is risky, complex and subtle! Imagine music, movies, books and paintings of the highest quality! Imagine art that permeates society, challenging conventional thinking and standard morals to their core! Imagine that it is all created by Christians! This is the bold vision of Steve Turner, someone who has worked among artists--many Christian and many not--for three decades. He believes Christians should confront society and the church with the powerful impact art can convey. He believes art can faithfully chronicle the lives of ordinary people and equally express the transcendence of God. He believes that Christians should be involved in every level of the art world and in every media. Yet art and artists have not always been held in high esteem by conservative Christians. Art rarely seems to communicate clear propositional truth, rarely deals with certainties and absolutes. And the lifestyles of artists too frequently seem at odds with the gospel. So the arts have often been discouraged among Christians. Throughout this stimulating book, however, Turner builds a compelling case against such a perspective. He shows that if Jesus is Lord of all of life and creation, then art is not out of bounds for Christians. Rather it can and should be a way of expressing faith in creatively, beautifully, truthfully arranged words, sounds and sights. This stirring call is must reading for every Christian who has been drawn to the arts or been influenced by them.

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Customer Reviews

This is, quite simply, the best book on the issues surrounding the life of a modern day Christian artist that I have ever read--period. I say this for several reasons:1. It is uncompromising, both in its descriptions of the artist's mind, dreams, and motivations, and also in its exacting analysis of what it

means to be a Christian. Turner pulls no punches in describing the incredible dichotomy between the gift of new life we have been given as a result of faith in the death and resurrection of Christ as atonement for our sins, and the very emotions, dreams, insecurities, and passions that drive the artist in his or her creative endeavors. It is true, at least in my experience (and as Rory Noland has written in his very good book, "The Heart of the Artist"), that Christians in the arts are often more prone to temptation since they allow their feelings and passions to not only enter in to their work, but to drive it.² It puts out a call for artists to not only do art in the church to glorify God, but especially to do art OUT in the world to carry His message of salvation to those who do not yet know Him. How often do we hear the statement that the "real" work of the Christian is religious in nature, or takes place in and around the church? But, as Turner writes, "Jesus is Lord" over the WHOLE of our lives, even and especially those parts that are very 'unreligious' in nature. We are called to live for Christ minute by minute.³ It is also honest in its assessment that the church often does not know what to do with the artists in our midst, let alone present an atmosphere in which they can flourish in their gifts and talents.

Steve Turner chose the name "Imagine" for this book. That should have been a tip-off. I suspect his intention was to be ironic--to use the name of John Lennon's anthem of socialist secularism to present his thesis for the exact opposite: a vision of Christianity influencing the arts. But Imagine is a maudlin, syrupy song and Turner's book, while presenting many intriguing ideas, is incomplete and actually gets the question backwards. Instead of asking "Why are many Christians hostile to the arts?" Turner should have asked, "Why are the arts so often hostile to Christians?" Before I tear into this book, I should say that Turner does get a lot of things right. For example, he gives the Catholic Church the proper credit for having always viewed art as a way of approaching the sacred, while Protestantism--particularly the evangelical brand of modern times--often views art as fundamentally worldly and approaching idolatry. He also correctly identifies the importance of art in all its forms as a means of communicating ideas to large groups of people. And, he recognizes how vital it is for Christians to engage in the arts in order to influence society. I almost said "evangelize" there, but in truth, that's where Turner's argument begins to fall flat. He seems to understand that Christian moral influence on society is a good thing, but worries that actual evangelization via the arts should only be done sotto voce--if at all. Turner dismisses contemporary Christian rock and instead holds up the band U2 as an exemplar of how Christians should influence the arts. While it is undeniable that U2 has had a major impact on the music scene over the years, they seem to do the opposite of what Turner calls for in this book.

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