

Liturgical Art Cruncher

This worksheet is designed to aid Christian laymen in critiquing art that is made for worship. A critique should generally not be conducted in a mechanical, input/output fashion, but this might serve as an objective starting point for dialogue concerning a work of ecclesiastical art.

1. Viewing the work as a whole, is Christ included?

Yes | No

- If yes, is he shown literally, or only symbolized or alluded to (e.g., a cross)?
- Would you describe Christ's significance in the work as major, or minor?

2. Who or what is the main subject?

- If the main subject is not the Son, is it the Father? The Holy Spirit?
- Or is the subject angels, the saints, mankind, or the worshippers?

3. Does the work have a specific message?

Yes | No

- If yes, what is the message?
- Is the message simple enough to be understood easily, or does it require a long explanation?
- Is the message clearly communicated in the work of art?
- Is the message primarily emotional, or theological?

4. Does the work proclaim law and gospel?

- That is, does it suggest the lost condition of mankind and the salvation won for us by Christ on the cross?

Yes | No

5. What level of stylization can be seen in the work?

Realistic 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10 Abstract

- If the work is stylized, does the stylization fit with the message?
- Does the stylization make it easier or more difficult to interpret/understand the work?

6. Is the work beautiful?

Yes | No

- If yes, does it also beautify the worship space for which it is intended?

(Cruncher Result Key)

Because works of visual art communicate in a less objective way than language, critique will always be somewhat subjective. The results of the cruncher may not be as straight-forward as you expect. This key is intended to help you weigh and interpret the results.

1. Viewing the work as a whole, is Christ included?

Because our worship is centered on Christ, it follows that any work of art that is intended to participate in worship should also be focused on Christ. However, the prominence and permanence of the work of art determines to what standard it should be held.

2. Who or what is the main subject?

Art for worship should always focus on God and work on behalf of mankind (the sacramental), especially Christ's sacrifice on the cross (1 Cor 2:2). Work that focuses on man's works, service, or praise to God (the sacrificial) is ultimately cheating the congregation out of the gospel.

3. Does the work have a specific message?

The type of artwork should always be taken into account here. Is it a work of architecture? Furniture? A banner? A painting? Some works are more conducive to communicating a message than others.

Insofar as the type of art *can* communicate a message, it should do so clearly and simply. An objective, theological truth is to be preferred to a subjective, emotional vibe.

4. Does the work proclaim law and gospel?

It is not easy to accomplish this in an image, or even a series of images, but it is something to strive for. If the work does not show or even allude to the cross, it is doubtful that it contains the gospel. If there is no gospel, there can be no true worship of God (Rom 12:1).

5. What level of stylization can be seen in the work?

Generally speaking, a work that is more realistic will communicate more clearly. Some stylization may be welcome and even necessary, but total abstraction is not capable of communicating objective truths.

A higher level of stylization will inherently draw more attention to the work itself and the artist who made it. It also increases the likelihood that the work will go "out of style" within a few decades, making the work distasteful to future generations.

6. Is the work beautiful?

This may be the most difficult question to answer, and the most divisive. But it is still a very important one. In matters of worship, questions of "taste" must give way to a concern for excellence. Christians must strive for an objective beauty that glorifies God and edifies his Church, not one that merely stimulates the senses.