

# A Chalk Line Drawn

Sheryl Velting

I feel that Rosalyn Reitsma in her article entitled “Chalk Line” has approached an apparent problem, but with fallacious evidence. Admittedly there is a gradual crumbling of the religious wall, therefore subjecting us more and more to the immediate world, but is this due to the influence of artists such as Hemingway and Michelangelo, or our own individual complacency about setting up standards? I mean the complacency of efforts in developing the potential sense of responsibility within young children about their own lives. Inevitably we are faced with reality if we read books and see paintings or not.

Responsibility should be encouraged in setting up standards in relation to the evaluation of the world and its products. If Hemingway and Michelangelo are breaking down systems that we are supposedly setting up then the power of what they have to offer should be the question.

Among the artistic world it is understood that a work should not be judged by the artist’s personal life. Hemingway’s book *The Old Man and the Sea*, illustrates a point of optimism and meaning in life which is a direct reversal of his personal life which ends in suicide as R. Reitsma pointed out. The “old man” fights the masses for his individuality and finds his satisfaction in the struggle with the fish. The tourists judge the outcome on material gains and therefore, upon seeing the skeleton of the fish judge the trip to be futile. Hemingway states in the novel that man can be destroyed but not defeated. It is in enduring that the old man finds durance. Is this the futility of life that R. Reitsma refers to? Is she judging on material gains?

In an autobiography by Hemingway there would possibly be the pessimism and futility of life, but is this a basis to exclude from one’s reading list a book which prods one on to know himself and choose that life which has the most meaning for him? Is not that why you as a reader are even a subscriber to the *Beacon Lights*? You enjoy the articles and they give you a deeper meaning for your life through the questions it may ask and answer.

Also, Michelangelo’s paintings are the subject under scrutiny, not the painter’s personal life. Does not God often produce great things through the world? Michelangelo strove to portray in a statue the very magnificence of life that God has endowed on humanity. Is art less beautiful and less worthy because an un-Christian person has produced it? I beg to differ. Art is art, greatness is greatness, and reality is reality.

The standards that we set up in ourselves and help to develop in others will cause the wall to continue crumbling or to be reconstructed.

Respectfully submitted,  
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Before beginning my defense of the position I assumed in the article, “A Chalk Line Drawn,” I would like to thank Miss Velting for the interest she expressed. It is through healthy discussion and interest that our Beacon Lights will continue to thrive as an expression of Protestant Reformed opinion. I would also like to state that the opinions which follow are in brief, so that our young people will find it easier to understand and read them. However, if further elucidation is desired, it can be had upon request.

What is art? This question has plagued Godly man since the distinction between what is beauty and what is ugliness first existed. In the early days of the earth, there was no question as to what was art: It was simply what God made beautiful in man's eyes. However, as time continued on its journey toward eternity, the issue, the answer to the question, became clouded. The Greeks came with their pagan ideas of beauty, the Romans came, but there is no evidence recorded that the Christian community followed or accepted these heathen standards of beauty. Came the Renaissance, however, and the Christian community of that day was swallowed up in the "new" standards, which, as evidenced by the name were not new, but simply a re-birth of what had been before. From that day to this, there has been increasing difficulty in distinguishing between what is true art and what is merely the beauty or art of heathen man. It is this distinction which I maintain, unequivocally, to be part of the wall between the Church and the world. It is this distinction which makes the wall a strong buttress against evil, while it is the blurring of the distinction, the confusing of true art with the art of the world which turns this buttress into a mere chalk line.

What, then, is true art? I noted the definition as I saw it, in the form of a question in the article "A Chalk Line Drawn." At that time I stated:

Isn't art basically the true expression of God's world, arising from the heart of a child of God to His glory?

This, I feel, is the only definition of true art acceptable to the Christian: That art is the glory of God expressed by God, through His Child, unto Himself. Anything which does not emerge from God unto Himself, that is, to His glory, is sin. Therefore, I maintain that sinful man is unable to produce true art because the Spirit of God is not in him.

I do not intend to imply, however, that sinful, i.e. unregenerate, man works to the detraction of God's glory. On the contrary, all things do ultimately work to the glory of God since all things are under His control. Nevertheless, sinful man cannot produce art because his goal is man's glory, not God's and he has not the Spirit of God in him.

What difference, then, can the Spirit make? In brief it is this: Without the sensory perception of the Spirit, man cannot see God in the world, though God be all around him, and not seeing God, he cannot see beauty, for he can see but dim reflections of the Source of beauty. As the branch cannot bear fruit without the vine, neither can man bear fruit without God (John 15:4). Art is art only if God is there.

Consequently, men like Hemingway who are, by walk and by declaration, men without the Spirit of God in them, cannot produce true art. Therefore, I cannot help but disagree with the position that an artistic work can be judged apart from the artist's life.

In the first place, the artistic world being just what it is—the world—can be no criterion of judgment for the Christian.

Secondly, the product can be no better than the producer. If the Spirit of God is obviously not present in the man, how can it be present in the expressions of that man? Can an evil tree produce good fruit? (Matt. 7:15-20)

Without God, the "artist" cannot produce true art, without God his works (like Hemingway's and Michelangelo) can be no more than expressions of sin, of futility. Life, success, satisfaction are void without God.

Yes, art is art, but only if God is there.

II.

The subject of greatness is also under scrutiny with Miss Velting's question: "Does not God often produce great things through the world?"

In reply to this question, I would like to state that this depends on one's definition of greatness.

If we were to state that greatness would mean notoriety or being of such power as to stand above the WORLD around it, I would say yes, God does produce great things through the world.

However, I do not feel that this can be the Christian's basis for a definition of greatness. As in art we look to the Source of beauty for a definition, so in greatness we must look to the Source of greatness. Many things are great in the eyes of a sinful world which could not be classified as great or good in the eyes of God. Sinful man thought Christ's crucifixion was a deed of greatness, so much so that he even took His blood upon himself and his children were he wrong. But by no means can the child of God construe this as greatness. Greatness and goodness can be equated. Christ says in Matthew twenty, verses twenty-five and twenty-six: "Ye know that the princes of the Gentiles exercise dominion over them, and they that are great exercise authority upon them. But it shall not be so among you; but whosoever will be great among you, let him be your minister:" In other words, greatness comes not in the power or strength we have, but, rather, in how we serve.

Greatness in the eyes of God is, therefore, not the greatness of the world, but the manifestation of His Spirit in the works of His children.

Upon this definition the question can only be answered: No, God does not produce great things through the world.

Greatness is greatness only if God is there.

### III.

Just as greatness is greatness only if God is there, so it is with reality. Reality, the only reality, is God. God has two revelations: The revelation found in His spoken Word, and the revelation found in the visual world. Actually, these two revelations are really one, for we cannot see the reality of things except for the light of His revelation spoken in His Word through the Spirit in us. We are unable nor should we seek to be able, to see reality except through the eyes of the Spirit, for in seeking reality we are seeking God's revelation to us in things.

However, God also uses the reality of evil to speak to us. The lesson of an evil world we cannot ignore, nor should we attempt to escape from it. The reality of evil is placed before us as a message and as a test too, and it is our concern to know it and search it for what God is saying to us through it. As discerning Christians, it is our duty to know our enemy, the world, and know him well. It is our duty AS CHRISTIANS. What I mean to say, is that we cannot hope to hear the message of God through the world, we cannot hope to stand the test of evil, or to combat this evil unless we are totally committed to God. As was stated in the article under consideration:

With total commitment as God as our base, we can go forward to study the world, even to read some of its literature and study its art. But we must ever remain alert, discerning students, always watching, lest we fall into temptation. For as long as possible, we must remain under the guidance of those older, wiser, and stronger than we are, and we must be prepared to avoid temptation whenever necessary.

Reality is reality only if God is there.

### IV.

Reality is reality, greatness is greatness, and art is art, but only when God is there. The source of beauty, goodness and truth is God, and it can only be in, through and unto Him that we find true art, greatness, and reality.

In the world around us today is much evil which we should not ignore. It is through thorough knowledge of our enemy, coupled with a firm base on the truth that we build our wall. But knowledge does not imply compromise. We cannot use the standards of the world to judge our esthetic life any more than we can use these standards to judge our religious life. In using these standards we draw, and then ultimately erase, the chalk line between what is called church and what is called world. For there is a chalk line drawn between church and world, but between the true Church and world there must be an impregnable wall, and we must build it.

-Rosalyn Reitsma

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