

BreakPoint - Good Work Done Well - Teaching Literature to the Glory of God



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[How do we look at art? How do we assess it's value?] Post Modernism

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BreakPoint with Charles Colson

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A professor at Yale for nearly five decades and the author of more than twenty books, Harold Bloom is one of the world's best-known literary critics. He has also amassed one of the world's greatest personal libraries. The New York Times says that his "collection of some 25,000 volumes encompasses most of American and British poetry, criticism, and literary history, some with his handwritten notes in the margins. There are rare first editions," as well as great artworks and personal letters from famous writers.

[He has a huge personal library - larger than mine, anyway.]

But the seventy-two-year-old professor has shocked the academic community by deciding to give all of this collection, not to a prestigious university, but to St. Michael's College, a small, obscure, Roman Catholic school in Vermont.

[An old professor is giving his library to a Catholic college?]

Part of the reason is that Yale and other large colleges already have enormous libraries and wouldn't have room for all of Bloom's collection. But there's more to it than that.

Bloom classifies himself as "an unbelieving Jew of strong Gnostic tendencies." He's criticized traditional religion and chastised religious thinkers for reading literature for its moral value rather than its aesthetic value. Nonetheless, he finds much to admire in St. Michael's Christian heritage.

[As a 'hostile witness', he believes in judging art on its art value alone, without consideration for morality or artists intent.

What do you think? Should we exhibit and promote art for art's sake alone?

If art is sacrilegious or pornographic, is it promoted for the sake of the arts?

Who determines if art is sacrilegious?

Who determines if art is pornographic?

Do you believe in watching immoral movies because they are a work of "art" or have great special effects?

How about watching movies because they make you laugh?]

And his aversion to our elite institutions is well known. He has been a critic of some of the most popular trends in literary criticism. **The postmodern academic world is a hotbed of fads like deconstructionism, feminist criticism, Marxist criticism -- approaches that look for hidden bias in literature, to the neglect of nearly everything else.** Critics who adopt such approaches believe that a **work of literature has no ultimate meaning beyond what the reader brings to it**, and that its only real value lies in taking it apart and exposing its oppressive ideologies.

[It doesn't appear the postmodern world cares about art for art's sake either. What do you believe he means by "... criticisms"?

Where have you heard about something only having the value man brings to it?

Which side of the Water Shed principle do you consider this to fall?]

He dismisses this kind of **criticism as "the school of resentment."** Instead, Bloom believes in **studying literature for its intrinsic value**, not in using it to advance a social agenda. At St. Michael's, he's found people who agree. His former student John Reiss taught English there until last year, and Bloom calls him **"someone who cares very passionately, has spent a lifetime teaching English and American literature for their intrinsic aesthetic, intellectual, and I suppose, in a very broad sense, spiritual values."**

In fact, Bloom told the New York Times, **"With rare exceptions the universities and colleges in the English-speaking world that have sustained some sense of literature as a matter of powerful cognition and extraordinary aesthetic beauty tend to be the Roman Catholic institutions."** So **Bloom wants St. Michael's to have his library because the school teaches literature the way it ought to be taught.**

[Does this surprise you? A religious institution would value art for arts sake?]

That's not surprising. Christian thinkers, Catholic and Protestant, because of their worldview, have always **believed in the intrinsic value of things and placed an emphasis on eternal, unchanging values.** It's the worldview that we explain here daily on BreakPoint.

Christian writer Dorothy Sayers stated, **"The only Christian work is good work done well."** The faculty at St. Michael's believes this, and their work is a **testimony to the One who gives meaning and value to all things.** That is something even a prominent agnostic can respect.

[On which side of the Water Shed Principle does the Christian view come under? Does this extend to sacrilegious or pornographic art?]

Water shed principle - <http://www.dfamily.com/philosophy/learn/journal.html#watershed>



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