

Artistic nudity: right or wrong?

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The word "nudity" conjures up all types of concepts in the mind of the reader relating to sex and sexuality, to the dismay of many religious and conservative people, and to the wholehearted approval of those more liberal-minded.

I intend to demonstrate, however, that there is a degree of error in both viewpoints; that artistic nudity is not wrong, but neither is the depiction of nudity always right. I hope to come to a middle ground where Christian individuals like myself can freely express themselves artistically, while still retaining their Christian testimony.

Art, simply, is expression. Good art is expression of truth, at least as the artist sees it. Frankie Schaeffer, son of the late Christian writer and philosopher Francis Schaeffer, affirms this in his book, *Sham Pearls for Real Swine*. A significant point that Schaeffer makes is that if art is truth, it is all-encompassing. Art can depict something beautiful, or something ugly, and if it shows the truth about the subject, it has succeeded as art.

The simplest level on which this works is through aesthetic truth--depicting the physical world with accuracy and beauty. The artist who paints a nude woman is expressing truth as much as the one who paints a bowl of fruit. Schaeffer points out that the human figure is even essential to good art.

"An artist who does not draw the nude figure cannot learn the traditional, accumulated skills of thousands of years of figurative western art history," claims Schaeffer.

There is a danger, however, of using this concept as an excuse for any and all nudity--or any and

all expression, for that matter. Artistic merit is not inherent in the subject alone, but is also bound up in its presentation. There is such a thing as pornography, and the presentation of the nude is the key. There are obvious examples, such as depictions of sexually explicit behavior, which are as far removed from a Michelangelo or Rembrandt nude as the east is from the west.

There are also more subtle cases which must be examined. This is why individual work must

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be examined for pornographic content, and not nudity as a whole. "Of course all nudity...has some sexual content, but then so does all of human life," explains Schaeffer. "But such portrayals are not selling sexuality for sexuality's sake, divorced from a loving human relationship, as is pornography."

Much of the difference lies in the motives behind the presentation. Too often today, nudity is depicted from motives of sexual stimulation or shock value. C.S. Lewis wrote in *Mere Christianity* that, "when people break the rule of propriety. . .if they do so in order to incite lust in themselves or others, they are offending against chastity. . .when, as often happens, they break it defiantly in order to shock or embarrass others, they are not necessarily being

unchaste, but they are being uncharitable."

At the same time it is easy for Christians to dismiss all nudity as pornography. This is unfortunate, since nudity possesses a rich and varied symbolism which is important to artistic expression. There are literal types of symbolism, such as the depiction of specific situations, and also human sexuality portrayed in moral fashion.

The point where ambiguity sets in, however, is when one enters the realm of metaphorical symbolism. Nudity can be used to express purity and innocence, or great shame, or vulnerability and helplessness, or even, in some cases, immorality.

Schaeffer's book classifies and explains the various traditional usages of nudity in art. There is: *nuditas naturalis*, the depiction of nudity as a fact of life; *nuditas temporalis*, the usage of nudity allegorically to act as a metaphor for misfortune, penitence and so forth; *nuditas virtualis*, which embodies purity or sinlessness; and *nuditas criminalis*, which portrays evil and wickedness. The important criterion when examining these, especially the last case, is how the subject is presented, and is good praised and evil condemned?

We live in an age which is extremely focused on sex. Sex is glorified; sex is celebrated; sex is encouraged--all as an end unto itself--rather than as part of a loving lifelong relationship. Whatever one's personal views on this issue, one can hardly blame the Christian community for reacting negatively to that which runs contrary to their deepest convictions.

It has become difficult to promote nudity in an artistic sense because the cultural waters have become so muddied. Where does nudity most often appear in 20th



photo by Paul Ulmen, artwork by Leland John

century American culture? The live nude is seen in strip clubs--instances where art is the last thing on the minds of the performers or the audience. In film, nudity appears not to advance the plot, or provide some sort of symbolism, but for gratuitous and torrid--and usually illicit--sex. In literature, nudity often appears for graphic description of equally steamy sex scenes.

In the fine arts, there are still many who desire honest, aesthetic expression, but there are also many who use their art as a venue for cheap sexuality. It is a popular culture which creates an atmosphere unfavorable and even hostile to the Christian individual, and

if the church has overreacted, it can be at least partially forgiven.

This is why I would like the two polar opposites of our society to come together artistically, and strive toward enrichment rather than retreat into stagnation. Those in secular society would do well to respect the position of fundamentalism rather than pursuing new heights of shock value for its own sake. At the same time, the church must realize that by rejecting art and culture, it is failing in its evangelical mission.

Christians are called to be in the world but not of the world, yet they cannot begin to solve the world's problems if they are not truly in it.

Customized computers: the way to go

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I bought a computer about a year and a half ago, and at that time, it was considered to be pretty fast. I assumed that it would last me at least three or four years. Unfortunately, I now need more memory, a bigger hard drive and a faster CD-ROM drive because games and applications simply have higher minimum requirements

than what my computer can handle.

During the fall of 1994, I decided to get a Pentium-60. At that time, the Pentium-75 was the best computer you could get; the P-60 seemed more than sufficient to handle anything the next few years could throw at it.

Last week, I decided to purchase "Jane's Advanced Tactile Fighter" which has minimum re-

quirements of eight megabytes of memory, 30 megabytes of hard drive space and a two-speed CD-ROM drive. My computer barely meets those requirements.

So, instead of buying more memory, a bigger hard drive and a faster CD-ROM drive (and then paying someone to install the new components), I've decided to simply get a new computer.

Fortunately, buying a computer is not as bad as most people think. However, the fact that I am buying a new computer kind of bothers me. A year and a half ago, my computer was top of the line. Now it barely meets the minimum requirements for a \$45 game.

Nonetheless, I'm going to have to get a new computer. To make the process easier, many computer companies now have World Wide Web (WWW) sites that can greatly facilitate the buying process.

In particular, both Gateway and Dell offer WWW sites that will let you choose a basic computer system, and then let you customize it to your own specifications. At the end of the "customization," you have the ability to see how much your vir-

tual computer will cost, complete with shipping costs.

I've decided to get a Pentium-133 with a 512 kilobyte cache, 16 megabytes of RAM and a one-gigabyte (1000 megabytes) hard drive. The computer comes standard with a four-speed CD-ROM drive. In addition, I've decided to get a 15" monitor with 2 megabytes

requirements."

Sure, I could just hold off buying the newer software and wait another year to buy a computer, but--especially true in the computer business--nothing stands still. If I just decided to wait a little longer for the prices to drop, I'll end up waiting for ever--new computers are released, and their prices start to drop, so I decided to wait and get the new system and so on.

When buying a new computer, make sure that you know what is going into it. Additionally, try and talk to friends (and the salespeople--they usually know what they are doing), along with reading reviews about the computer. Of course, if you are buying a customized computer, a review won't mean much, unless you decided to customize your computer based on the review.

In the end, if someone wants to buy a new computer, they are just going to have to break down and buy it.

If at all possible, try and get a "customized" computer which can be built to your specifications, at a cost usually less than buying a pre-packaged system.



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a VRAM (Video RAM). Most people I've talked to have said that setup might last two years. I.e., two years from now, my computer will just be meeting the "minimum