Leland Ryken, editor, [*The Christian Imagination: The Practice of Faith in Literature & Writing*](http://www.amazon.com/Christian-Imagination-Practice-Literature-Writing/dp/0877881235/ref%3Dsr_1_2?ie=UTF8&qid=1443623991&sr=8-2&keywords=the+Christian+imagination) (Colorado Springs: WaterBrook Press, 2002)

Summary:

“The great sin of most of the stories of popular culture…is not that they are violent or obscene or godless, but that they waste our time.”

Leland Ryken has edited *The Christian Imagination*, an anthology of over fifty authors examining how the Christian imagination functions and functions uniquely, especially with one’s approach to stories. The focus of the book could also be framed as a question: How does a Christian view literature and writing?

With chapters and quotes from writers such as J.R.R. Tolkein, Francis Schaeffer, C.S. Lewis, Jacques Maritain, Flannery O’Connor, T.S. Eliot, G.K. Chesterton, Wendell Berry, Brian Godawa, and Madeleine L’Engle, Ryken organizes his book first by topic—a Christian philosophy of literature, imagination, beauty, and creativity—and then by genre—Myth and Fantasy, Poetry, Narrative.

Consider using part of the book for discussion—*A Christian Philosophy of Literature, The Christian Reader,* or *Narrative*—or individual chapters such as “Authors, Authority, and the Humble Reader,” “In Praise of Stories,” or “Redemption in the Movies.”

Themes:

* Reading & Writing. Christians are “people of the book” but also very much “people of the story.”
* Stories. “A story is the telling of the significant actions of characters over time.” And stories often follow a certain narrative arc: creation (origins), fall (problem), and redemption (solution), the same arc (or cycle) found in Scripture.
* Myth/Fantasy. Christians have a unique affinity for myth and fantasy, because they know that supernatural forces can act on lives and events.
* A Christian Reader. “To read well, we must become as little children.” Despite the postmodern “death of the author,” Christians can exhibit humility when submitting before a text. C.S. Lewis said, “The first demand any work of any art makes upon us is surrender. Look. Listen. Receive.” Christians can receive art rather than (only) using it.

Discussion Questions:

1. Are there some books that never should be read? Why or why not?
2. “When we support poor writing…we commit a moral offense.” Could we substitute the word “art” for “writing”?
3. What are elements of a Christian aesthetic? A Christian poetic?
4. How is literature a “little incarnation”?
5. Are artists prophets? Priests? Kings?
6. What is the danger of separating style and substance when judging a written work?
7. How does the concept of “total effect” in Leithart’s chapter affect one’s reading?
8. How do movies both influence and reflect society?
9. How is a Christian’s submission to a text tied to biblical authority?
10. Is nudity or cursing ever appropriate for art?
11. Good literature balances form and content. How is Christ the perfect combination of these?
12. Does escape differ from escap*ism*? Is either a valid rationale for literature?
13. What are books you’ve read that are “useful and delightful”?
14. Why or how are humans “a tribe of incorrigible makers”?
15. Picasso said, “Art is a like that makes us realize the truth.” How is this true?