

# Good example of biographical sketch of author book review

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## **Book Review: Culture Making – Recovering Our Creative Calling**

Andy Crouch, the author of *Culture Making*, is a longtime theologian and Christian culture writer, having spent more than 15 years in the field. Crouch studied classics at Cornell University, and received a Master's in Divinity *summa cum laude* from Boston University School of Theology. From 1998 to 2003, Andy edited *re: generation quarterly*, which was a magazine dedicated to Christian cultural creativity, and spent a decade at Harvard University as a campus minister for the InterVarsity Christian Fellowship. In 2012, Andy Crouch was named the new executive editor for *Christianity Today* magazine, having already executive produced their *This is Our City* Christian culture project. He is an extremely prolific writer of works on Christian culture, including 2013's *Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power*, making him an authority on the relationship between Christianity and culture.

### **Summary of Concepts**

In *Culture Making: Recovering Our Creative Calling*, Andy Crouch stresses the need for Christians to take charge of their culture in order to change it. Crouch first explores the idea of 'culture' and what it means to a society: "Culture is, first of all, the name for our relentless, restless human effort to take the world as it's given to us and make something else." According to Crouch, most Christians have a very simplistic attitude toward culture, treating it as an ambiguous system of thought that is pervasive and omnipresent. Instead, Crouch believes culture must be treated as a series of particular cultural goods which can be confronted on an individual level to

make changes within culture itself. In order for Christians to be able to make changes in their culture and world to further encourage Christian fellowship, the way in which they relate to culture must be changed.

There are four distinct ways that Christians relate to culture: condemning, critiquing, copying, and consuming. By using these methods to interact with culture, Christians will often either tacitly approve of un-Christian elements in society or insufficiently protest them. When critiquing culture, according to Crouch, one must be careful not to turn the gestures of resistance into mere postures; many Christians simply sneer and look up their noses at current popular culture, instead of changing it to the way they want it to be. Crouch encourages Christians to create culture instead of pulling away from the culture that offends them. In order to create culture, Crouch emphasizes starting small and forming tiny spheres of influence which may be more malleable and open to changes (such as our families). Change must start small, and Christians have a responsibility to forge their culture along Christian values.

## **Critical Evaluation**

In *Culture Making*, Andy Crouch's overall purpose is to enlighten his Christian audience as to the most effective and fulfilling ways of changing the culture around them to reflect their values. This book is likely written as a response to the common Christian lament of today's culture being too secular or "godless," and Christians attempting to find ways to change it. This results in a standoffish position toward culture and a refusal to interact with it and become part of the equation. The aforementioned four methods of

interacting with culture are argued to not be the answer, despite being what most Christians do in the face of modern cultural attributes. Instead of reacting in a hostile manner to modern society, Crouch argues that the most effective way to facilitate change is to engage with culture and change it for the better.

One of Crouch's strengths is the piecemeal way he proposes culture is approached; by treating culture as a series of cultural elements, instead of one overarching philosophy, strategies to shape our world become more achievable and practical. Also, Crouch's perspective of starting small and focusing on small family groups and communities is also admirable, as it does not impose a grand scheme of changing all of culture to a Christian viewpoint; this permits a greater inclusiveness and tolerance for the beliefs of others. If the smaller culture you create is successful, people will flock to it and expand that culture: " So if we seek to change culture, we will have to create something new, something that will persuade our neighbors to set aside some existing set of cultural goods for our new proposal."

One of the few weaknesses in Crouch's book is the covering of church history; while giving Christianity its proper context in the realm of culture, it is a bit too broad and Anglocentric to truly be a comprehensive and accurate history of Christianity. There is little to no sense of the international engagement with culture that has likely been taking place, instead focusing merely on the American white perspective. This has the effect of limiting the book's audience and preventing more people from benefiting from its teachings. Furthermore, Crouch makes a point of intentionally glossing over historical details to focus on the story's general importance. This contradicts

his treatment of Scripture as completely and totally accurate, sending mixed messages about how important the Bible is in interpreting culture. This results in a much more holistic, feel-good perspective on Christianity than a wholly historically accurate one (which is likely Crouch's intent, in order to make it more approachable).

Despite these problems, Crouch's book is still an incredibly admirable effort, one couched in positivism and practical goals for changing culture to reflect Christian values. Crouch notes that our obligation to change and cultivate culture comes from the grace of God Himself: "Where are we called to create culture? At the intersection of grace and cross." To that end, Crouch simply suggests that you start within your own community, surrounding yourself with people who can cultivate grace and spread their gifts outward as they choose, "and then, together, make something of the world."

Because of this inherent positivity, and Crouch's practical, step-by-step suggestions for changing culture as an alternative approach, *Culture Making* is essential reading for those who wish to apply Biblical principles to the world around them.

## **Works Cited**

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