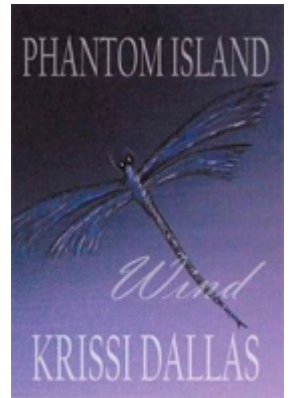


Finally! Quality YA Fiction from a Christian Worldview

May 30, 2009

Krissi Dallas has hit the road running with her debut novel, *Phantom Island: Wind*. It instantly found its way to the number one selling spot at Authorhouse.com as the word-of-mouth buzz about this page-turner spread like wild fire surrounding the novel's release. The novel is Young Adult fiction; it's full of drama, adventure, suspense, and romance. As a vested seventh and eighth grade teacher and the wife of a youth pastor, YA fantasy-fiction is something Krissi Dallas is an expert on and has a passion for. Her love and affinity for her students, as well as the openly autobiographical nature of much of the book, have allowed Dallas to "open a vein," and write from the depths of who she is, from the heart. This deep connection transfers itself to the reader. I found myself desperately curious; no, not just curious, committed and concerned about the characters. Reading until the end of the chapter wasn't enough: I had to find out what would happen next and would they be okay. I don't think I have ever read a book this size this quickly—not even any of the *Harry Potter* series... which I also toted obsessively wherever I went so I could read every chance I got.



Phantom Island: Wind is divided into three parts, and it's part two that really gets you. If you weren't addicted already in part one, you definitely will be when part two begins. This is also where the fantasy part of this fantasy-fiction novel really kicks in. You know how you can tell when you're reading really good fantasy-fiction? When you can't tell. If you ever find yourself questioning the reality the author's created, it isn't good fantasy-fiction. While reading *Wind* I never once

caught myself raising my eyebrow thinking, *I don't know about that*. I was completely engrossed.

Wind is well written. Dallas has a captivating command of detail. Good literature is good literature, regardless of the target audience. *Phantom Island* isn't just for teenagers; it's for anyone who hasn't forgotten how to read – how to imagine and empathize and create. The plot and character development; the intrigue, the tension, the romance, the journey, the discovery; every thing about the Island kept me turning pages when I should have been sleeping.

Wind is the first book in the *Phantom Island* series. *Water*, is scheduled to come out Summer 2010. It's always nice to have something to look forward to, especially the "small" things; I can't wait to find out what happens next. For more about *Phantom Island* visit www.krissidallas.com/.

This blog post originally appeared at
reneamac.com/2009/05/30/phantom-island-wind/

Glee-tastic!

May 4, 2010

I love this show. I'm not afraid to admit it. The raw talent of the cast, the character development, the geekiness, the music (duh), and the wonderful caricature of the American high school experience. I come back week after week for the clever plot lines and dialogue, and the overall impeccable artistry. I know what some of you are thinking–*Glee is just a show about sex-crazed teenagers, pushing a liberal agenda! How can you watch that stuff and call yourself a Christian?* And you're right... on the surface. If you look deeper, you'll find more

depth—just like with teenagers, come to think of it. They can be a mess on the outside, seemingly concerned with nothing but what's superficial, shiny, sexy; but if you take the time to look deeper, wow: what perspective, passion, potential. (Whereas we adults tend to keep our messiness better concealed.)

Glee has such high appeal in part because almost everyone, both in and out of high school, feels like somewhat of a misfit; and *Glee* is a show which highlights that fact and how essential it is for us as unique and even flawed human beings to have a safe place to be unique and even flawed, giving us our common ground back and showcasing what the Church ought to: hospitality. The show also has lots of appeal because it's good art: it's well made and speaks to the human condition. If we don't want to forfeit our influence in our world, then we need to be more discerning about art: just because a show (or song or sculpture or painting or novel) depicts unChristian ethics or values doesn't mean it's bad art. Likewise, just because a piece of art depicts Christian values doesn't mean it's good art.

Sometimes the art we come in contact with will match up pretty solidly with the Creation-Fall-Redemption narrative of Scripture. Sometimes it represents the complete opposite ideas about what life is like and what it means to be human. But most of the time, as with the TV show *Glee*, we are presented with ideas that partly conform to Christian doctrine or ethics, or are but a shadow—"All truth is God's truth." Art comes out of the ideas in the heart and minds of the women and men who create the work, and Romans 2 tells us that God has written his truth on the hearts of all people. Certainly *Glee* is a shadow, and at times, in that shadow are moral messes and liberal agendas. So we have to watch *Glee* through the lenses of our biblical worldview. We have to watch *Glee* [with our brains turned on](#).

Watching *Glee* with our brains turned on, we can be aware of

and reject what goes in opposition to a biblical framework, and affirm what is good, even if those good qualities and ideas about life fall short of what Christ gives as we pray his Goodness come; his Good be done (Mt 6:10). My favorite quality about *Glee* is the unexpected dives into full-bodied, deeply human characters. And it's *Glee*'s knack for flipping expectations and busting through the stereotypes, stereotypes *Glee* has set up itself, that allows me to write the following as a way of merely observing while withholding judgment, because you never know when *Glee* will flip something.

So what are *Glee*'s flat places that I'm hoping will curve and plunge and flip? Well, I'm afraid they're pretty typical: a woman's choice; hypocritical, asinine Christians; "I knew you were gay when you were three"; and my personal favorite, feelings-driven love. That's where I'm going to camp out, but I will make a small note about a woman's choice. This problem goes deeper than abortion. Because regardless of whether or not we murder the child (and the good news is that more and more people [and movies and other social media] paint abortion in a negative light and [favor life](#)), when the choice is all Hers, we kill off the humanity of the father too. He becomes just a sperm donor. There's a very important episode of *Glee* admonishing young men to treat women like persons and work against objectifying them. There needs to be one about how women objectify men.

Which leads me to feelings-driven love and false romantic ideals. Have you ever stopped to think about what books and movies and TV shows and pop songs are all telling us about what love is and what ideal romance looks like? If you haven't noticed, love is a feeling. And romance is an intense, often tumultuous, chemistry-infused whirlwind affirmed by ~~good~~ sex great sex.

Already there are some elements of the romantic plot-lines in *Glee* that cause me to be hopeful that things will flip, but until they do, the following scenes perfectly expose the love

= feelings definition that we know in our heads isn't right but aren't doing much to counter in our own lives.*

Before I dive into the scenes, a little Will & Terri Schuester background:

Once upon a time Will, the goody choir boy had a crush on an older girl named April. That didn't work out so he dated and subsequently fell in love with Terri. Together for many years, their marriage [sic] appeared to grow stagnant until Terri announced she was pregnant. Will was quick to step up to be the daddy despite his wandering eye for the ginger co-worker [Emma]. ([Glee Wiki](#))

Okay. Scene: Will finds out Terri's been faking the pregnancy and freaks out (naturally). After ripping the pregnancy pad from Terri's waist, Will tearfully tries to make sense of his upside-down world:

Why did you do this to us? I don't understand.

I thought you were leaving me. You're so different, Will. We both know it; I can feel you, you're pulling away from me.

Why, because I – I started standing up to you, trying to make this a relationship of equals?

No, because of the damn Glee club! Ever since you started it you just started walking around like you were better than me.

I should be allowed to feel good about myself!

Who are we kidding, Will? This marriage works because you don't feel good about yourself.

[...]

I loved you Terri, I really loved you.

I'm so sorry, Will. I'm so sorry. Do you remember at that

appointment? Do you remember what we said? That at that moment, no matter what happened, we loved each other. We could get that feeling back again. You could love me back, Will. ("Mattress")

Exit Will.

Next episode. The Glee Club kicks tail (and Lea Michele does the best ["Don't Rain on My Parade"](#) I've ever heard) and take Sectionals, after which Will comes back home for the first time since he left to change clothes for Emma's wedding.

Enter Terri:

I want you to know I've been seeing a therapist. It's just at the local community center, but still.

Good. I hope it works out for you.

I'm taking responsibility, Will. I mean, I'm weak, and I'm selfish, and I let my anxiety rule my life. But you know I wasn't always that way. It's just that I wanted so many things that I know we're never gonna have. But that was okay as long as I still had you. Will... say something.

I'm looking at you, and I'm trying... I mean, I really want to feel that thing I always felt when I looked at you before, that feeling of family, of love. But that's gone.

Forever?

I don't know. ("Sectionals")

So there it is. Love = feelings and this distorted love defines our relationships and whether or not they're worth fighting for. At least for episodes 12 and 13... The writers have very cleverly set things up so that we experience the relationship almost entirely from Will's perspective; and we are set up to dislike and distrust Terri and root for Emma. We

soothe ourselves for hoping Emma and Will get together even though Will is married to Terri because Terri is selfish, often mistreats Will (and others), and is antagonistic toward Glee, the one thing outside of family that makes Will come alive. While Emma is adorable and caring and seems to have more in common with Will; she's entirely the lovable underdog we love to cheer for.

But... I kind of feel as though *Glee* is setting us up to see ourselves for what we really are: unsympathetic, quick to judge and slow to search for the whole story, quick to follow and go after what feels good rather than what is good. Because while Terri Schuester says and does a lot of things that make us question her right to take up space (without the comic relief of Sue Sylvester), there are these deftly placed moments—those *Glee* -moments—where Terri is human, vulnerable and hurting. And you begin to feel sympathy and find yourself thinking... *Is this a trick?*

So we'll see what happens. With each new episode I look forward to more plot twists, magical musical numbers, Sue Sylvester quotes, and busting of social myths and categories.

*[A 2008 survey](#) on the divorce rate in America: about one in three. (And Christians? Largely the same: about one in three.) Christian porn and masturbation and the connection to [fantasy-inflated expectations](#) of real life. ["Christian" novels](#) are just as bad, if not worse, at proliferating a false romantic ideal.

This blog post originally appeared at
reneamac.com/2010/05/04/glee-tastic/

Go to the Movies. . . But Don't Turn Off Your Brain!

Feb. 12, 2010

How many of you have seen one movie in the past month (on TV or at the theater)? Two movies? Three? Ten? How many of you, like me, see so many movies on a regular basis it's too hard to count? Do you know how many movies are made on average per year in Hollywood? Over the last ten years or so, Hollywood puts out an average of six hundred movies each year. That's almost two a day—many many more if you include Bollywood. Movies are everywhere! They show up in abundance in our culture and in our lives. On that level alone movies are important to think about and discuss in our Christian communities as we try to help one another live more like Christ.

But movies aren't only important because they're prevalent. Movies are important because they communicate ideas about what is true. We've always used art as a way of expressing our beliefs about and experiences of reality: what is true about life and what it means to be a person, why is there evil and how can we be saved from it... "Man has always and will continue to express his hope and excitement, as well as his fears and reservations, about life and what it means to be human through the arts. He will seek to express his world through any and all available mediums, and presently that includes film."[\[1\]](#)

So movies are important not just because they're everywhere, but because they tell us about life and what it means to be human. Normally, in church, when we talk about where our ideas about life and what it means to be a person and how we should live, where do we say those ideas come from? Right, the Bible.

And that's true! But God has given us art too. And we need art

and science and nature and each other and the Bible to interpret what is real, what is true. We need all of these things together to help us make sense of life; because life can sometimes be a mess. When your friend betrays you and you don't know why. When your parents divorce. When life isn't bad just uncertain, or confusing... or complicated because two boys like you at the same time or you're not exactly sure where you want to go to college... Now, the Scriptures come first among all informers of reality; but we'll come back to that.

I have to thank my friend and colleague [Todd Kappelman](#); he works with me at Probe and he is a professor of philosophy at [Dallas Baptist University](#). I'll be pulling a lot from his lecture "Perspectives on Film: What's in a movie?" Let me quote Todd:

"A film is able to convey an enormous range of human experience and emotions. A good film maker, script writer, director, producer, or actor can take us to places that we might never be able to see through our everyday experiences."

Can you think of some examples? *Avatar*. *Lord of the Rings*. Even movies like *Saving Private Ryan* or *Braveheart*. And because movies are able to involve us in situations that are outside of our everyday experiences, but that we can relate to, "[movies] may also show us things about our world that would otherwise remain hidden to the untrained eye." For example, *Wall-E*. How many of you have seen *Wall-E*? So basically humanity destroys all oxygen-producing plant life and has to ship civilization out into outer space. Everyone's on a giant cruise ship in space, lounging in these mobile recliners that take them wherever they want to go and they have these screens that pop up and they can order whatever food they want, and it comes right to them. And they've been living like this in space for years so everyone is super fat. There are a couple of underlying messages in this movie; they're pretty obvious, right? Take care of the Earth our home

and discipline yourself in this world of modern convenience. But because these messages are communicated to us, not directly in the world in which we live, but indirectly through a world with robots and space cruise ships, it's a message that's easier to swallow.

The underlying messages of *Wall-E* are pretty obvious; however, many movies have messages which are much more subtle. And unless we know what to look for and how to look for it we will miss it. We will miss what the movie is really saying behind the special effects and witty dialogue. Often movies communicate ideas about life and reality through symbols; it's like code. The movies don't often just come out and say, "This is the message about life from this movie." So we need to learn how to interpret the code.

Movies have ideas and those ideas come from the women and men who make them. Duh. Right, I know. But we don't always think about it. Every person has a [worldview](#) and that worldview is always in a person's art.

My colleague Todd gives us five basic questions to ask when watching movies:

1. How important is life to the director/writers, etc? Are tough issues dealt with or avoided? "Christian" movies come to mind when I think of this question. Sometimes these movies are really bad about candy-coating life—everything ends nice and neatly and all the bad stuff about life is kind of skipped over or neatly dealt with. This is a disservice because it isn't true to life.

2. Is there a discernible philosophical position in the film? If so, what is it, and can a case be made for your interpretation? How many of you saw Avatar? I saw it twice. It was awesome in 3D. I hear it's even cooler in XD. I'll let you in on a not-so-secret secret. Hollywood's favorite and most popular worldview right now is pantheism. Think about

Avatar and look at your chart (under Cosmic Humanism). See anything that rings familiar from the movie?

3. Is the subject matter of the film portrayed truthfully? Here the goal is to determine if the subject matter is being dealt with in a way that is in agreement with or contrary to the experiences of daily reality. Let me think here... what comes to mind? Um... romantic comedies. Don't get me wrong, I like many romantic comedies, but I also go to those movies with my brain turned on, watching the screen through my biblical worldview lenses. And it's important we do that because those movies aren't just fun-loving and warm-fuzzy, they also communicate ideas about romance and marriage and dating and sex. And if we go into these movies with our brains turned off, we will begin to subconsciously absorb these false ideas. If I'm not filtering the film with my biblical worldview, I can easily begin to expect my love life to be like the movies, which when I say it out loud like that sounds ridiculous. But it happens in subtle ways and more often than we think.

4. Is there a discernible hostility toward particular values and beliefs? Does the film seek to be offensive for the sake of sensationalism alone? I think a case can be made that The DaVinci Code fits into this category. But you know, hostility toward Christianity is all over, not just movies, but TV too. When Christians are portrayed on the show Criminal Minds for example, they're often extreme fundamentalists who hate gays and repress women. And you know, that's a legitimate complaint against some who call themselves Christians. But when those are the only types of Christians shown time and time again on TV and in the movies, the whole picture isn't being shown. It's being distorted.

5. Is the film technically well made, written, produced and acted? I confess, Transformers II was a major disappointment. It was technically well done; I mean, the special effects were awesome. But the writing... I felt like I was getting

dumber sitting there listening to that dialogue. Even the plot had some holes in it, which was disappointing because I like action flicks.

Now as Christian interpreters, we have three more questions to ask ourselves:

1. Does the interpretation of reality in this work conform to or fail to conform to Christian doctrine or ethics? Sometimes a movie will match up pretty solidly with the Creation-Fall-Redemption narrative of Scripture. Sometimes a movie will represent the complete opposite ideas about what life is like and what it means to be human. But most of the time, movies present to us ideas that partly conform to Christian doctrine or ethics. Because movies come out of the ideas in the heart and minds of the women and men who create them, and Romans 2 tells us that God has written his truth on the hearts of all people.

2. If some of the ideas and values are Christian, are they inclusively or exclusively Christian? That is, do these ideas encompass Christianity and other religions or philosophic viewpoints, or do they exclude Christianity from other viewpoints? The case could be made that *The Book of Eli* presents Christian values in an inclusive way. It's subtle, and if you blinked you might have missed it. The movie isn't about preserving the Word of God. It's about preserving the religious books of the world. And it is no mistake that the Bible was placed right next to the Koran in the library at the end.

3. If some of the ideas and values in a work are Christian, are they a relatively complete version of the Christian view, or are they a relatively rudimentary version of Christian belief on a given topic? (Like *Criminal Minds*.)

Finally, a few cautions:

1. Just because a movie depicts unChristian ethics or values doesn't mean it's bad art. Likewise, just because a movie depicts Christian values doesn't mean it's good art.

2. Be careful not to allow your personal perspective to dominate the description of a particular work. Try to understand as many other perspectives as you can.

3. Do not expect a non-Christian to agree with you, arrive at the same conclusions, or completely understand your perspective. At best we can hope to offer a clear and coherent insight into a work and thereby gain an opportunity for a Christian voice to be heard.

Okay. So movies are important. And so is the need for Christian interpretation. So if you like movies as much as I do, I hope you will go to the movies and keep your brain turned on because movies communicate messages about life and what it means to be human. And if we don't turn *on* our brains, we will unknowingly begin to believe untruths about life and what it means to be human. Movies are also important because they provide a good, nonthreatening way to talk about truth and worldview—ideas about life and what it means to be human—with our friends.

1. Kappelman, Todd, Film and the Christian, bit.ly/LvfUe1

This blog post originally appeared at
reneamac.com/2010/02/12/go-to-the-movies-but-dont-turn-off-your-brain/

Should Christians Respect Obama?

Mar. 9, 2010

The email below titled "Should Christians Respect Obama?" was forwarded to me. Perhaps you've seen it too. (I have formatted the spacing to fit below; however, all emphases—bolds, italics, exclamation marks, words in all caps—are original.)

Dr. David Barton is more of a historian than a Biblical speaker, but very famous for his knowledge of historical facts as well as Biblical truths.

Dr. David Barton – on Obama

Respect the Office? Yes. Respect the Man in the Office? No, I am sorry to say. I have noted that many elected officials, both Democrats and Republicans, called upon America to unite behind Obama. Well, I want to make it clear to all who will listen that I AM NOT uniting behind Obama !

I will respect the Office which he holds, and I will acknowledge his abilities as an orator and wordsmith and pray for him, BUT that is it. I have begun today to see what I can do to make sure that he is a one-term President !

Why am I doing this ? It is because:

- I do not share Obama's vision or value system for America ;
- I do not share his Abortion beliefs;
- I do not share his radical Marxist's concept of re-distributing wealth;
- I do not share his stated views on raising taxes on those who make \$150,000+ (the ceiling has been changed three times since August);
- I do not share his view that America is Arrogant;
- I do not share his view that America is not a Christian

Nation;

- I do not share his view that the military should be reduced by 25%;
 - I do not share his view of amnesty and giving more to illegals than our American Citizens who need help;
 - I do not share his views on homosexuality and his definition of marriage;
 - I do not share his views that Radical Islam is our friend and Israel is our enemy who should give up any land;
 - I do not share his spiritual beliefs (at least the ones he has made public);
 - I do not share his beliefs on how to re-work the healthcare system in America ;
 - I do not share his Strategic views of the Middle East ;
- and
- I certainly do not share his plan to sit down with terrorist regimes such as Iran .

Bottom line: my America is vastly different from Obama's, and I have a higher obligation to my Country and my GOD to do what is Right ! For eight (8) years, the Liberals in our Society, led by numerous entertainers who would have no platform and no real credibility but for their celebrity status, have attacked President Bush, his family, and his spiritual beliefs !

They have not moved toward the center in their beliefs and their philosophies, and they never came together nor compromised their personal beliefs for the betterment of our Country ! They have portrayed my America as a land where everything is tolerated except being intolerant ! They have been a vocal and irreverent minority for years ! They have mocked and attacked the very core values so important to the founding and growth of our Country ! They have made every effort to remove the name of GOD or Jesus Christ from our Society ! They have challenged capital punishment, the right to bear firearms, and the most basic principles of our

criminal code ! They have attacked one of the most fundamental of all Freedoms, the right of free speech !

Unite behind Obama? Never ! ! !

I am sure many of you who read this think that I am going overboard, but I refuse to retreat one more inch in favor of those whom I believe are the embodiment of Evil! PRESIDENT BUSH made many mistakes during his Presidency, and I am not sure how history will judge him. However, I believe that he weighed his decisions in light of the long established Judeo-Christian principles of our Founding Fathers!!! Majority rules in America , and I will honor the concept; however, I will fight with all of my power to be a voice in opposition to Obama and his "goals for America ." I am going to be a thorn in the side of those who, if left unchecked, will destroy our Country ! ! Any more compromise is more defeat ! I pray that the results of this election will wake up many who have sat on the sidelines and allowed the Socialist-Marxist anti-GOD crowd to slowly change so much of what has been good in America !

"Error of Opinion may be tolerated where Reason is left free to combat it." – Thomas Jefferson

GOD bless you and GOD bless our Country ! ! !

(Please, please, please, pass this on if you agree.)

Thanks for your time, be safe. "In GOD We Trust"

"If we ever forget that we're one nation under GOD, then we will be a nation gone under." – Ronald Reagan

I WANT THE AMERICA I GREW UP IN BACK....

In GOD We Trust.....

Respectfully, I disagree. The person who wrote this email didn't say how to respect the office without respecting the person holding it. It may be possible to do so; however, I believe it is more important to respect people than positions. It sounds very noble to say, "I respect the office but not the

man.” It’s like saying, “I respect my boss’s position of authority over me, but I don’t respect my boss.” But in my experience, this attitude makes it very difficult to “do everything without complaining or arguing.” That habit derives only from love. And love is expressed by subordinates to their authorities largely through respect (Eph 5:21–6:8; note especially 5:33 and 6:5).

It is possible not to respect the positions the President holds and still respect the President as an Image-bearing human creation if nothing else. But this kind of generosity which derives from thinking Christianly (a Christian worldview) is not expressed in this email. The tone of this email conveys contempt, not respect. I’m particularly unnerved by the way the term “embodiment of Evil” was tossed out there. Calling liberals Satan incarnate is sensationalist at best and certainly doesn’t portray the high view of human dignity that Christianity gives us.

A few other side notes to consider when viewing email forwards like this one:

- It is highly unlikely that a PhD wrote an email in such broad strokes with such inflammatory language, not to mention so many exclamation points. (In fact, I would be cautious of anything with this many exclamation marks, whether it claims to be from a PhD or not because when every sentence is exclaiming, that’s a sign that the email is not trying to get you to think about the topic, but is only interested in goading an inordinately emotional reaction from you (as opposed to an emotionally passionate response tempered with thought-full-ness).)
- From Dad: “Dr. Barton’s website does not have a record of this document – so, I doubt that it is from him. I sent an e-mail inquiry to wallbuilders.com asking them to comment on its authenticity.” Thanks Dad!

- Thirdly, there are at least three of the President's views/positions that have been distorted and intentionally misrepresented in this email. Email forwards are notorious for this, and there is very little that is less Christian than bearing false witness.

- Finally, I just want to comment that it is okay for Christians to disagree about most of the items in that list. This email implies that a Christian nation (whatever that means anyway) would resemble the exact set of beliefs behind this email; it implies that any good Christian would agree with this email wholesale.

So, should Christians respect President Obama? We, more than anyone, should—especially if you dislike him and/or disagree with his basic platforms. It is easy to love people we like: people who are like us, people with whom we agree. But Christ demands we love those who are irritating to us.

But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for He causes His sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? If you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same? Therefore you are to be perfect, as your heavenly Father is perfect.

This blog post originally appeared at
reneamac.com/2010/03/09/respect-obama/

Banned Books Week

Oct. 1, 2010

We have come to the end of Banned Books Week, where avid readers everywhere band together to protest the idea of banning books (or more accurately, band together to celebrate books they love that have been banned by having readings and themed parties). Books are banned and protested for a sundry of reasons, reasons we sympathize with and some we certainly do not sympathize with. But even when it comes to books we don't think are appropriate, movements for the outright, absolute banishment of these books from libraries or from Christian society is rarely helpful. Such movements cause division over matters which are disputable and sometimes simply draw more attention to and raise more interest in the book a particular group is trying to get rid of.

Often, books are banned by people who haven't read them and do not understand them; people simply join the banned books bandwagon. And while fight or flight may be more natural, only the act of humbly engaging is constructive. We are called to act in creative and redemptive ways as we pray, "Thy Kingdom come; Thy will be done on earth as it is in heaven." It is essential to engage, not merely absorb or avoid, books (and ideas) that scare and/or anger us, books that feel wholly foreign to us. Although—for of a variety of factors, not the least of which because each of us has our own sin-issues particular to our personality and set of experiences—not everyone will be able to engage with everything at the same level. And it's the which and by whom and the how that requires more individual discernment than broad banishings. Even when you cannot personally engage by reading this or that book for whatever reason, abiding an attitude of general engagement as a member of the Body of Christ fosters that humility-infused unity so foundational to our new life.

As we celebrate Banned Books Week here at [Probe](#), we invite you to chew with us on the questions such an acknowledgment brings to the table. We'd love to hear your thoughts, and as always, keep reading.

- *What are some constructive alternatives to banning or burning books? ie. discussion forum, panel discussion (even at the library in question) or for a meeting of the PTA*
- *Should a Christian pause and ask, Am I being retributive to "those liberals" and others who certainly ban Christian or conservative viewpoints? Is that something that promises to be profitable, biblically speaking? Is it a Christlike motive?*
- *While understandably fighting for convictions, could I be guilty of putting my own personal convictions on others inappropriately? How could this be detrimental or even wrong to do with non-believers? With believers? [disputable matters passage, like meat offered to idols]*
- *Would it be more profitable to read and discuss the book in question with my children and even others' kids w/parental permission (perhaps with some blocking of objectionable portions) than to rail against the author, message or library?*
- *Pragmatically speaking, am I simply bringing objectionable materials to light and putting them up on a stage by the attention they are now getting because of my lobbying efforts? Am I offering ammo to those who oppose any censure or social accountability?*
- *Am I giving the Enemy a foothold for bitterness in me or my kids? In onlookers?*

This blog post originally appeared at
reneamac.com/2010/10/01/banned-books-week/

Privacy 2010

Introduction

Ten years ago, I did a Probe radio program called ["Privacy 2000."](#)^{1} At the time, American citizens were concerned about some of the new technological advances and government programs that seemed to be threats to their privacy.

So much has happened in the last ten years. Technological developments have provided individuals, companies, and governments with new tools which could be used to violate our privacy. A war on terror has changed our perception of what is or is not appropriate for government to know about its citizens. In fact, I developed a week of radio programs on ["Homeland Security and Privacy."](#)^{2}

One thing I have noticed is that most Americans seem less concerned about intrusions into their lives. Part of it may be due to a resigned assumption that we have to give up some of our privacy to fight the terrorists. But another significant reason, I believe, is a younger generation that seems completely unconcerned with threats to their privacy. After all, many of them are sharing intimate details of the lives on [Facebook](#) and [MySpace](#). Why be concerned if companies, the government, or the general public knows details of their lives when they voluntarily share those details on social networks?

This is not to say that all citizens are unconcerned about privacy violations. Recent debates about a national ID card and the collecting and centralization of medical information for government health care programs illustrate that many people are concerned about privacy. But the percentage of citizens concerned about privacy seems to be decreasing.

Privacy is something that most of us take for granted until we lose it. And often we lose our privacy in incremental steps so we are less aware of our increased exposure. Some events can shock us back to reality. Identity theft or the posting of embarrassing information on the Internet can quickly remind us how much privacy we have lost.

We should also make a distinction between privacy and secrecy. Whenever someone expresses concern over a violation of their privacy, another is sure to ask, "What do you have to hide?" The question confuses privacy with secrecy. You may not have anything to hide, but that doesn't mean that you are willing to have companies collect lots of information about you and then sell it to other companies for a profit. You may not want your future boss to know about a medical procedure that was done twenty years ago. You may not want a telemarketer to have your purchasing history so he can call your mobile phone.

In this article we look at various ways we have lost our privacy. These range from intrusion to deception to profiling to identity theft.

Seven Sins against Privacy: Intrusion

Privacy is a common word but often misunderstood because of its various meanings. We know when we feel that someone has violated our privacy, but we can't always give a definition to it, especially in this age in which new technology allows perpetrators to cross boundaries more easily than in the past.

David Holzman describes three basic meanings for privacy.^{3} They are easy to remember because they all begin with the letter s. The first is seclusion. That is the right to be hidden from the perceptions of others. The second meaning is solitude. This is the right to be left alone. The third meaning is self-determination, which is the right to control information about oneself.

He suggests that privacy violations can be viewed as seven sins ranging from intrusion to deception to profiling to identity theft. Let's look at each one of these sins against privacy.

Sin of Intrusion – The classical form of privacy abuse is intrusion. This “is the uninvited encroachment on a person's physical or virtual space.”[\[4\]](#) In previous ages, it took the form of voyeurism or peeping. Technology today allows for a much great intrusion into our lives and is often much more difficult to detect.

In recent years, we have read about how actors, models, and sportscasters have had their privacy violated by people who placed cameras or listening devices in their rooms or on their person and recorded them. But it isn't just the famous that are being recorded. Every day pictures are being taken of us as we walk into banks, into grocery stores, or past ATM machines. We are being recorded on the streets and at traffic lights. It has been estimated that the average person is caught on surveillance cameras three hundred times a day in London.[\[5\]](#)

And it is not just big brother that is watching and listening to you. Voyeurism technology is available to anyone who wants to purchase it. Stores and Web sites “sell remote listening devices, digital optics, scanners for picking up cell-phone conversations, and even infrared scanners.”[\[6\]](#)

Radio Frequency Identification Devices (RFID) act like a wireless bar code and is being used more often in stores and other establishments (such as libraries) for inventory control. Geographic Positioning System (GPS) receivers are satellite locating devices that are found in cars, cell phones, and many other devices.

Intrusion violations have been made easier by technology. In the past, someone had to get near to you in order to spy on

you. And that increased the possibility that you would find out that someone is watching you. Now we live in a world where your privacy is being violated, and you are probably not even aware that it is happening.

Seven Sins against Privacy: Latency and Deception

Sin of Latency – Most of the damage to your privacy comes from stored information. The harm is minimized if personal information is not retained. The sin of latency comes from the excessive hoarding of information beyond an agreed-upon time. Most companies do not have a data-aging policy.

It is understandable why companies and the government collect excessive information. First, they need to have enough information so they know they have the right person. There are lots of John Smiths in a particular locality. They need to know you are the particular John Smith they want. In the past, a telephone number was sufficient identification. Now we have more than one phone and change numbers regularly. So our Social Security number and other identifiers are necessary.

A second reason for companies to collect information is so they can more effectively sell their products and services to you. They collect that information from the forms you fill out and even place cookies on your computer in order to catalogue your visits to their Web site.

We might assume that a company would delete your information when you close your account. Most companies merely mark your file as inactive. And many of them sell your information to others. "A consumer record with up-to-date information is worth around \$200 for cell phone information. Social Security information sells for \$60 and a student's university class schedule goes for \$80." [\[7\]](#)

One of the largest collectors of personal data is Google. When you search for items on the Internet, Google collects that information, and that reservoir of information can begin to paint a picture of your interests, opinions, and worldview. And because Google saves that information for a long time, it can do extensive database matching.

Google was involved in a legal battle with the U.S. Department of Justice that subpoenaed their log files. They wanted to use them to make the case that pornography constitutes a substantial part of Internet searching. A judge ruled that Google needed to only turn over a limited set of information with identifying notations stripped off.[\[8\]](#)

Sin of Deception – With so much electronic information available in databases, it is tempting for individuals, companies, and even bureaucrats to use personal information in a way that was not authorized by the person.

Here are some principles that arise from our discussion so far. When a company or governmental agency asks for personal information we should have the right to know three things: what they are going to do with it, how long they will keep it, and whether they will make it available to others. When we fill out a form for a credit card or enter into a contract for a car or house, we reveal lots of information. We may naively assume that they will be the only ones who will see that information. That is not so. Regularly we see stories in the news about companies selling consumer data to third parties. Most of us would be shocked at how much information about us in the hands of people who have never met or done business with.

Seven Sins against Privacy: Profiling and Identity Theft

Sin of Profiling – Past behavior is not always a perfect

predictor of future behavior, but it can be a surprisingly accurate one. That is where profiling comes in. Collecting information about what goods and services someone purchases can enable companies to predict a consumer's future purchases.

Profiling is often used to predict more than that. David Holzman says that he worked with one credit card company that said "it was able to pinpoint when its consumers were having life crises such a mid-life depression by psychographically analyzing their buying patterns."[\[9\]](#)

One of the best known examples of profiling is credit scoring. Equifax, Experian, and TransUnion rely on FICO scores. A high score will help you get a home loan. A low score may result in being denied a home loan and even having to pay higher interest on other forms of credit. Most Americans don't know their credit score (only about two percent), and most do not understand the algorithm used to calculate it.

Profiling is also used to fight terrorism, but have also caught innocent people in their profiling net. For some time my name was on a watch list, and people like columnist Cal Thomas and Senator Ted Kennedy were on a no-fly list.

These mistakes prove an important point: profiling is a guessing game. And sometimes a wrong guess can have a detrimental impact on citizens and consumers.

Sin of Identity Theft – Most of us know what identify theft is because it has happened to someone we know or else we have heard commercials about how to protect ourselves from identity theft. Although this crime did exist in the past, it has exploded on the scene now because of technology and the changing nature of transactions. Personal information is readily accessible on the Internet. And in the electronic marketplace of today, purchases are not made face-to-face. It is easy for someone to assume your identity and leave you with the consequences.

How easy is it? A New York busboy was caught stealing the identities of people on the Forbes 400 list. He used the Internet to do the research and had been successful in stealing the identities of famous people like Steven Spielberg, Oprah Winfrey, and Ted Turner.[{10}](#)

Sometimes all a hacker or thief needs is your Social Security number and your mother's maiden name. Unfortunately it is relatively easy to obtain this information. Universities, banks, and all sorts of institutions use your Social Security number as your identification number. Genealogy files online most likely have your mother's maiden name. Once a thief has that information, he or she is ready to access your financial accounts.

Sometimes we inadvertently give out that information. A phone call from someone pretending to be a bank executive can often elicit confidential information. "Phishing" is a mass e-mail with a message pretending to be a bank or brokerage. People who believe that it is genuine will enter information that the thief can use to drain their bank accounts.

Seven Sins against Privacy: Outing, Lost Dignity

Sin of Outing – Some privacy violations are deliberate and can take place when someone reveals information that another person would like to remain hidden. The term "outing" is usually used to describe a public revelation of a closet homosexual, but we can use the term to describe any information that is published about a person they do not want to be public.

Citizens, politicians, and even corporations have been the targets of Internet messages that have been used to damage their reputation. A number of court cases have attempted to force Web site managers to reveal the identities of those who

are spreading false and libelous information.

Sometimes outing is a good thing. Think of all the potential pedophiles that have been caught because they thought they were chatting online with a potential underage victim. Sting operations by the police have successfully revealed the motives of some who intend to proposition their young victims.

Sin of Lost Dignity – This last concern is more difficult to quantify, but we all realize that when private information is made public, we can lose a part of our dignity. What if all of your medical records were made public? What if every essay you ever wrote in school was available online?

Even public figures (like politicians) believe they should have a zone of privacy. Past and current presidents have refused to publish all of their medical records, school records, and other private information. While we may debate whether public figures should reveal all of this information, we would probably all agree that private citizens should not lose a zone of privacy in their lives.

In this article we have talked about how technology allows us to peer into other people's lives. That is why we need to revisit the subject of ethics as it relates to technology that can violate our privacy. We shouldn't use technology to spy on others or to hurt their reputation. Christians should express their concerns about intrusions into their privacy.

This subject also reminds us that we must live our lives above reproach. Philippians 2:14-15 says "Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may prove yourselves to be blameless and innocent, children of God above reproach in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you appear as lights in the world." 1 Timothy 3:2 says that an elder must be "above reproach" which is an attribute that should describe all of us. Live a life of integrity and you won't have to be so concerned about what may be made public in

age where we are losing our privacy.

Notes

1. Kerby Anderson, "Privacy 2000," Probe Web site, 2000, www.probe.org/privacy-2000/.
2. Kerby Anderson, "Homeland Security and Privacy," Probe Web site, 2003, www.probe.org/homeland-security-and-privacy/.
3. David Holzman, *Privacy Lost: How Technology is Endangering Your Privacy* (San Francisco: Josey-Bass, 2006), 4.
4. Ibid., 5.
5. Ibid., 6.
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid., 10.
8. Ibid., 13.
9. Ibid., 19.
10. Ibid., 23.

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The Appeal of Twilight

Stephenie Meyer's *Twilight* series currently hold three of the top ten slots on Amazon's best sellers list. Her Young Adult novels about a love story between a human girl (Bella) and her vampire boyfriend (Edward) are popular with far more than just young adults. And "popular" is quite the understatement.

A friend who does ladies' nails told me that one of her 60-something clients confessed, "Don't tell my husband, but I'm in love with Edward." She also told me that when she invited one of her friends to go out to a movie, she was rebuffed with, "Oh, sorry, but I'm going to stay in with Edward tonight."

“Popular” doesn’t quite describe the series. “Obsession” works well, though.

What’s all the fuss about? And is it safe for young readers?

What struck me as I read *Twilight* is how much the vampire Edward displays the beauty and strength of the Lord Jesus Christ. No wonder people are attracted to him! Whether this is intentional or not—the author is a Mormon, though I don’t see Mormon theology anywhere in the book—I believe it’s easy to get wrapped up in the transcendent relationship of a god-like figure and his beloved human sweetheart because it echoes the love story of God and His people.

Consider the way Edward is written:

- *He is able to read minds (hearing the thoughts of those near him, with the exception of Bella)*
- *He has superhuman strength*
- *He has superhuman speed*
- *He consistently exhibits strong self-control, keeping his emotions and his great power in check*
- *He is loving, kind, and thoughtful*
- *He is self-sacrificing*
- *He is tender and sensitive, at the same time the essence of masculine strength and leadership*
- *He is lavishly generous*
- *He anticipates Bella’s needs and desires and is prepared to meet them in ways that are in her best interests, even if it costs him*
- *He sparkles in the sunlight with a stunning radiance*

Edward and Bella’s relationship echoes the dynamics of Christ and His beloved bride, the Church. The relationship is a mixture of agony and sacrificial love. Human and vampire are very different and very other, yet they both desire oneness and intimacy. This reflects the way humanity and divinity come together in Christ and the Church.

Bella tells Edward, "You are my life" (p. 474). This sense of connecting to and being lost in the transcendent is the foundation of a healthy relationship with our Creator and Savior; but it is the essence of unhealthy emotional dependency in another creature. It sounds very romantic, to put all one's eggs in another's basket, but it also gives all our power away to that person since they have the power to make and keep us happy and fulfilled. This is safe in Jesus' hands, but no one else's.

I think there is a good reason for the strong reaction to the characters and the dynamics of the story. They resonate with the far larger Story of God wooing His people.

I found one passage that hints at a worldview perspective on the *Twilight* series. On page 308, Bella asks Edward where vampirism started originally. He answers,

"Well, where did you come from? Evolution? Creation? Couldn't we have evolved in the same way as other species, predator and prey? Or, if you don't believe all this world could have just happened on its own, which is hard for me to accept myself, is it so hard to believe that the same force that created the delicate angelfish with the shark, the baby seal and the killer whale, could create both our kinds together?"

However, thinking biblically, we know that the vampire "kind" doesn't truly exist. It's a fantasy. There are no "undead" people like vampires. Hebrews 9:27 tells us that "it is appointed unto man to die once; and after this comes judgment." Transitioning from human to vampire by being bitten with a vampire's venom doesn't happen.

The book's cover features a pair of hands proffering an apple. Just after the table of contents, this quotation from Genesis 2:17 appears by itself on a page: "But of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, thou shalt not eat of it; for in

the day that thou eatest thereof thou shalt surely die.”

The author says on her website,

The apple on the cover of Twilight represents “forbidden fruit.” I used the scripture from Genesis (located just after the table of contents) because I loved the phrase “the fruit of the knowledge of good and evil.” Isn’t this exactly what Bella ends up with? A working knowledge of what good is, and what evil is. The nice thing about the apple is it has so many symbolic roots. You’ve got the apple in Snow White, one bite and you’re frozen forever in a state of not-quite-death... Then you have Paris and the golden apple in Greek mythology—look how much trouble that started. Apples are quite the versatile fruit. In the end, I love the beautiful simplicity of the picture. To me it says: choice. (www.stepheniemeyer.com/twilight_faq.html#apple)

Should tweens and teens read this series? I think it provides an opportunity for parents and other authority figures (like youth group leaders) to read and discuss the themes of the book with youth, particularly what makes Edward so attractive. People are drawn to him for the same reason that a seeking heart is drawn to Jesus. The best use of this book and series is if the reader can be pointed to the One who can actually fulfill the fantasy that Stephenie Meyer writes so well, of being cherished by a strong and beautiful Lover who thinks and acts sacrificially.

Because the heart that is drawn to Edward is actually looking for Jesus.

Note: Since writing this blog post, I have read all the books and done a lot of research, coming to a different conclusion.

Please be sure and read Part 2: [A New Look at Twilight: Different Conclusion](#). Thanks!

This blog post originally appeared at
blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/the_appeal_of_twilight
on March 16, 2009.

A New Look at Twilight, Different Conclusion

Last year (June 8, 2010) I [blogged about *Twilight*](#), connecting the dots between the supernatural vampire character of Edward Cullen and Jesus. I suggested that perhaps the reason millions of people so resonate with that character is that what they're really looking for is the glory and perfection of the Lord Jesus Christ, which Edward appears to manifest in various ways.

Since then, I have read all the books and done months of research. It's like pulling the camera focus back, back, back. . . . and finding some extremely disturbing details now in our field of vision.

I have now come to a very different conclusion.

I was stunned to learn about how the idea for *Twilight* came to the author, Stephenie Meyer. She tells this story:

"I woke up . . . from a very vivid dream. In my dream, two people were having an intense conversation in a meadow in the woods. One of these people was just your average girl. The other person was fantastically beautiful, sparkly, and a

vampire. They were discussing the difficulties inherent in the facts that A) they were falling in love with each other while B) the vampire was particularly attracted to the scent of her blood, and was having a difficult time restraining himself from killing her immediately.”

“Fantastically beautiful, sparkly, and a vampire”? Consider what vampires are, in the vampire genre that arose in the 1800s: demon-possessed, undead, former human beings who suck blood from their victims to sustain themselves. A vampire is evil. And the vampire who came to Stephenie Meyer in a dream is not only supernaturally beautiful and sparkly, but when she awoke she was deeply in love with this being who virtually moved into her head, creating conversations for months that she typed out (obsessively, she says) until *Twilight* was written.

When I heard this part of the story, it gave me chills. 2 Corinthians 11:14 tells us that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light, which is a perfect description of the Edward Cullen character.

Then I learned that “Edward” came to Meyer in a second dream that frightened her. She said, “I had this dream that Edward actually showed up and told me that I got it all wrong and like he exists and everything but he couldn’t live off animals. . . and I kind of got the sense he was going to kill me. It was really terrifying and bizarrely different from every other time I’ve thought about his character.”

I believe that Stephenie Meyer’s dream was not your ordinary dream. The fact that “Edward” came to her in a second dream that terrified her (but she dismissed it and kept on writing), indicates this may have been a demonic visitation. I do believe *Twilight* was demonically inspired.

But there’s more.

All four books are permeated with the occult. The *Twilight*

vampires all have various kinds of powers that don't come from God. They are supernaturally fast, supernaturally strong, able to read others' minds and control others' feelings. Some can tell the future, others can see things at great distances. These aspects of the occult are an important part of what makes *Twilight* so successful.

In both the Old and New Testaments, God strongly warns us not to have anything to do with the occult, which is part of the "domain of darkness" (Colossians 1:13). *Twilight* glorifies the occult, the very thing God calls detestable (Deuteronomy 18:9). This is reason enough for Christ-followers to stay away from it!

Last year I wondered if Edward was something of a Christ-figure. Now I think this character is a devious spiritual counterfeit to Jesus that has captured the hearts of millions of obsessed fans who are in love with a demonic "angel of light."

And they don't know it.

Note: My article on the Probe website is now online, with much more information than what's in this blog post: probe.org/twilight

This blog post originally appeared at blogs.bible.org/engage/sue_bohlin/a_new_look_at_twilight_different_conclusion

Hayek and 'The Road to Serfdom'

Kerby Anderson gives an overview of the bestseller The Road to Serfdom and explains how it is consistent with a Christian worldview.

Why the Interest in Hayek and *The Road to Serfdom*?

A few years ago, if you said the name Friedrich Hayek to the average person in society, they wouldn't know his name. They might wrongly guess that he was the father of actress Selma Hayek. His name was unknown to non-economists.



Today he has much more visibility. People are reading his classic book, *The Road to Serfdom*, perhaps in order to make sense of our troubled economic climate and the current administration's policies. When TV host Glenn Beck talked about Hayek and *The Road to Serfdom*, the book went to number one on Amazon and stayed in the top ten for some time. A [rap video](#) featuring cartoon versions of Hayek and John Maynard Keynes have been viewed over a million times on YouTube.

Why all the interest in a Vienna-born, Nobel Prize-winning economist who passed off the scene some time ago? People are taking a second look at Hayek because of our current economic troubles. Russ Roberts, in his op-ed, "Why Friedrich Hayek is Making a Comeback," [{1}](#) says people are reconsidering four

ideas Hayek championed.

First, Hayek and his fellow Austrian School economists such as Ludwig Von Mises argued that the economy is much more complicated than the simple economic principles set forth by Keynes. Boosting aggregate demand by funding certain sectors with a stimulus package of the economy won't necessarily help any other sector of the economy.

Second, Hayek highlighted the role of the Federal Reserve in the business cycle. The artificially low interest rates set by the Fed played a crucial role in inflating the housing bubble. Our current monetary policy seems to merely be postponing the economic adjustments that must take place to heal the housing market.

Third, Hayek argued in his book that political freedom and economic freedom are connected and intertwined. The government in a centrally controlled economy controls more than just wages and prices. It inevitably infringes on what we do and where we live.

Even when the government tries to steer the economy in the name of the "public good," the increased power of the state corrupts those who wield that power. "Hayek pointed out that powerful bureaucracies don't attract angels—they attract people who enjoy running the lives of others. They tend to take care of their friends before taking care of others."[\[2\]](#)

A final point by Hayek is that order can emerge not just from the top down but also from the bottom up. At the moment, citizens in many of the modern democracies are suffering from a top-down fatigue. A free market not only generates order but the freedom to work and trade with others. The opposite of top-down collectivism is not selfishness but cooperation.

Although *The Road to Serfdom* was written at the end of World War II to warn England that it could fall into the same fate as Germany, its warning to every generation is timeless.

Misconceptions About *The Road to Serfdom* (part one)

Hayek wrote his classic book *The Road to Serfdom*[\[3\]](#) more than sixty years ago, yet people are still reading it today. As they read it and apply its principles, many others misunderstand. Let's look at some of the prevalent misconceptions.

Because Hayek was a Nobel-winning economist, people wrongly believe that *The Road to Serfdom* is merely a book about economics. It is much more. It is about the impact a centrally planned socialist society can have on individuals. Hayek says one of the main points in his book is "that the most important change which extensive government control produces is a psychological change, an alteration in the character of the people. This is necessarily a slow affair, a process which extends not over a few years but perhaps over one or two generations."[\[4\]](#)

The character of citizens is changed because they have yielded their will and decision-making to a totalitarian government. They may have done so willingly in order to have a welfare state. Or they may have done so unwillingly because a dictator has taken control of the reins of power. Either way, Hayek argues, their character has been altered because the control over every detail of economic life is ultimately control of life itself.

In the forward to his book, Hayek makes his case about the insidious nature of a soft despotism. He quotes from Alexis de Tocqueville's prediction in *Democracy in America* of the "new kind of servitude" when

after having thus successively taken each member of the community in its powerful grasp, and fashioned him at will, the supreme power then extends its arm over the whole community. It covers the surface of society with a network of

small, complicated rules, minute and uniform, through which the most original minds and the most energetic characters cannot penetrate to rise above the crowd. The will of man is not shattered but softened, bent and guided; men are seldom forced by it to act, but they are constantly restrained from acting. Such a power does not destroy, but it prevents existence, and stupefies a people, till each nation is reduced to be nothing more than a flock of timid and industrious animals, of which the government is the shepherd.[{5}](#)

Tocqueville warned that the search for greater equality typically is accompanied by greater centralization of government with a corresponding loss of liberty. The chapter was insightfully titled, "What Sort of Despotism Democratic Nations Have to Fear."

Tocqueville also described the contrast between democracy and socialism:

Democracy extends the sphere of individual freedom; socialism restricts it. Democracy attaches all possible value to each man; socialism makes each man a mere agent, a mere number. Democracy and socialism have nothing in common but one word: equality. But notice the difference: while democracy seeks equality in liberty, socialism seeks equality in restraint and servitude.[{6}](#)

Hayek believed that individual citizens should develop their own abilities and pursue their own dreams. He argued that government should be a *means*, a mere *instrument*, "to help individuals in their fullest development of their individual personality."[{7}](#)

Misconceptions About *The Road to Serfdom*

(part two)

Another misconception about Hayek is that he was making a case for radical libertarianism. Some of the previous quotes illustrate that he understood that the government could and should intervene in circumstances. He explains that his book was not about whether the government should or should not act in every circumstance.

What he was calling for was a government limited in scope and power. On the one hand, he rejected libertarian anarchy. On the other hand, he devoted the book to the reasons why we should reject a pervasive, centrally controlled society advocated by the socialists of his day. He recognized the place for government's role.

The government, however, should focus its attention on setting the ground rules for competition rather than devote time and energy to picking winners and losers in the marketplace. And Hayek reasoned that government cannot possibly know the individual and collective needs of society. Therefore, Hayek argues that the "state should confine itself to establishing rules applying to general types of situations and should allow the individuals freedom in everything which depends on the circumstances of time and place, because only the individuals concerned in each instance can fully know these circumstances and adapt their actions to them."[10](#)

Wise and prudent government must recognize that there are fundamental limitations in human knowledge. A government that recognizes its limitations is less likely to intervene at every level and implement a top-down control of the economy.

One last misconception has to do with helping those who suffer misfortune. It is true that he rejected the idea of a top-down, centrally controlled economy and socialist welfare state. But that did not exclude the concept of some sort of social safety net.

In his chapter on “Security and Freedom” he says, “there can be no doubt that some minimum of food, shelter, and clothing, sufficient to preserve health and the capacity to work can be assured to everybody.”[\[11\]](#) He notes that this has been achieved in England (and we might add in most other modern democracies).

He went on to argue that the government should provide assistance to victims of such “acts of God” (such as earthquakes and floods). Although he might disagree with the extent governments today provide ongoing assistance for years, Hayek certainly did believe there was a place for providing aid to those struck by misfortune.

Paved With Good Intentions

Friedrich Hayek wrote *The Road to Serfdom* to warn us that sometimes the road can be paved with good intentions. Most government officials and bureaucrats write laws, rules, and regulations with every good intention. They desire to make the world a better place by preventing catastrophe and by encouraging positive actions from their citizens. But in their desire to control and direct every aspect of life, they take us down the road to serfdom.

Hayek says the problem comes from a “passion for conscious control of everything.”[\[12\]](#) People who enter into government and run powerful bureaucracies are often people who enjoy running not only the bureaucracy but also the lives of its citizens. In making uniform rules from a distance, they deprive the local communities of the freedom to apply their own knowledge and wisdom to their unique situations.

Socialist government seeks to be a benevolent god, but usually morphs into a malevolent tyrant. Micromanaging the details of life leads to what Hayek calls “imprudence.” Most of us would call such rules intrusive, inefficient, and often downright idiotic. But the governmental bureaucrat may believe he is

right in making such rules, believing that the local people are too stupid to know what is best for them. Hayek argues that citizens are best served when they are given the freedom to make choices that are best for them and their communities.

Hayek actually makes his case for economic freedom using a moral argument. If government assumes our moral responsibility, then we are no longer free moral agents. The intrusion of the state limits my ability to make moral choices. "What our generation is in danger of forgetting is not only that morals are of necessity a phenomenon of individual conduct but also that they can exist only in the sphere in which the individual is free to decide for himself and is called upon voluntarily to sacrifice personal advantage to the observance of a moral rule."[\[13\]](#) This is true whether it is an individual or a government that takes responsibility. In either case, we are no longer making free moral decisions. Someone or something else is making moral decisions for us. "Responsibility, not to a superior, but to one's conscience, the awareness of duty is not exacted by compulsion, the necessity to decide which of the things one values are to be sacrificed to others, and to bear the consequences of one's own decision, are the very essence of any morals which deserve the name."[\[14\]](#)

A socialist government may promise freedom to its citizens but it adversely affects them when it frees them from making moral choices. "A movement whose main promise is the relief from responsibility cannot but be antimoral in its effect, however lofty the ideals to which it owes its birth."[\[15\]](#)

Hayek also warned about the danger of centralizing power in the hands of a few bureaucrats. He argued that, "by uniting in the hands of a single body power formerly exercised independently by many, an amount of power is created infinitely greater than any that existed before, so much more far reaching as almost to be different in kind."[\[16\]](#)

He even argues that once we centralize power in a bureaucracy, we are headed down the road to serfdom. "What is called economic power, while it can be an instrument of coercion, is, in the hands of private individuals, never exclusive or complete power, never power over the whole of life of a person. But centralized as an instrument of political power it creates a degree of dependence scarcely distinguishable from slavery."[\[17\]](#)

Biblical Perspective

How does *The Road to Serfdom* compare to biblical principles? We must begin by stating that Friedrich Hayek was not a Christian. He did not confess Christian faith nor did he attend religious services. Hayek could best be described as an agnostic.

He was born in 1899 into an affluent, aristocratic family in Austria. He grew up in a nominally Roman Catholic home. Apparently there was a time when he seriously considered Christianity. Shortly before Hayek became a teenager, he began to ask some of the big questions of life. In his teen years, he was influenced by a godly teacher and even came under the conviction of sin. However, his quest ended when he felt that no one could satisfactorily answer his questions. From that point on he seems to have set aside any interest in Christianity and even expressed hostility toward religion.

Perhaps the most significant connection between Hayek and Christianity can be found in their common understanding of human nature. Hayek started with a simple premise: human beings are limited in their understanding. The Bible would say that we are fallen creatures living in a fallen world.

Starting with this assumption that human beings are not God, he constructed a case for liberty and limited government. This was in contrast to the prevailing socialist view that human beings possessed superior knowledge and could wisely order the

affairs of its citizens through central planning. Hayek rejected the idea that central planners would have enough knowledge to organize the economy and instead showed that the spontaneous ordering of economic systems would be the mechanism that would push forward progress in society.

Hayek essentially held to a high view and a low view of human nature. Or we could call it a balanced view of human nature. He recognized that human beings did have a noble side influenced by rationality, compassion, and even altruism. But he also understood that human beings also are limited in their perception of the world and subject to character flaws.

Such a view comports with a biblical perspective of human nature. First, there is a noble aspect to human beings. We are created in the image of God (Gen. 1:27-28) and are made a little lower than the angels (Psalm 8:5). Second, there is a flaw in human beings. The Bible teaches that all are sinful (Rom. 3:23) and that the heart of man is deceitful above all things (Jer. 17:9).

Hayek believed that “man learns by the disappointment of expectations.” In other words, we learn that we are limited in our capacities. We do not have God’s understanding of the world and thus cannot effectively control the world like socialists confidently believe that we can. We are not the center of the universe. We are not gods. As Christians we can agree with the concept of the “disappointment of expectations” because we are fallen and live in a world that groans in travail (Romans 8:22).

Although Hayek was not a Christian, many of the ideas in *The Road to Serfdom* connect with biblical principles. Christians would be wise to read it and learn from him the lessons of history.

Notes

1. Russ Roberts, “Why Friedrich Hayek is Making a Comeback,”

Wall Street Journal, 28 June 2010.

2. Ibid.

3. F.A. Hayek, *The Road to Serfdom: Text and Documents, the Definitive Edition*, ed. Bruce Caldwell (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2007).

4. Ibid., 48.

5. Ibid., 49.

6. Ibid., 77.

7. Ibid., 115.

8. Ibid., 57.

9. Ibid., 59.

10. Ibid., 114.

11. Ibid., 148.

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid., 216.

14. Ibid., 217.

15. Ibid.

16. Ibid., 165.

17. Ibid., 166.

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What the Heck, Mr. Beck?

America has recently been abuzz about Glenn Beck and his rather large contingent of followers. Ever since somewhere between 90,000 and a billion people showed up at his Restoring Honor rally to hear the Fox News host and radio-talker prophesy from on high, fans and foes have heaped adulation, disgust, cheer, hatred, exuberance, and all sorts of emotions on the man himself. The response depends on whom you ask and what sort of political worldview they hold. Those on the political right tend to like him and see where he is coming

from; however, those on the opposite side of the political divide generally show antipathy toward Beck and his event.

Adding to the Left's (and some others') angst was the fact that he conducted his rally at the stoop of the civil rights movement—the Lincoln Memorial—on the very spot where Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., on the same day 47 years ago, delivered one of America's defining speeches. Would Mr. Beck live up to that august standard? Would he dare use this sacred place and auspicious moment as an occasion to butcher the Obama administration and, in his view, their evil conspiracy to bring America to the hard left?

In fact, no. He did something out of character. Departing from his usual message, diverging from the political path—he instead spoke of God. He opined about honor. He sounded more like a religious, pulpit-pounder than the partisan, chalkboard artist that he usually is. He declared that “something beyond imagination is happening. America today begins to turn back to God.”[\[1\]](#) Wow! How awesome is that? Someone in our nation standing up for God. Or is he?

Who is God?

When we dig deeper, having already donned our distinctively Christian worldview lenses, Beck's message may not be what it seems. Is he really trying to turn America back to God? The God that we as evangelical Christians believe in—the one in the Old Testament as well as in the New? The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? The Triune God—you know, the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit? In fact, as you listen to Mr. Beck's rhetoric, you might notice that he never defines which God he is actually referring to. How can you say that America is turning back to God and never define the God that you are talking about—unless you are taking one for granted? Is this the god of civic religion we hear invoked so often within the halls of power? Maybe America is seeking a god who is not really there—because it doesn't exist. Or maybe America wants

to fashion, shape, and mold a god of its own—a god who is not true yet makes people feel a little better.

This god that is being fashioned here by Mr. Beck's verbiage seems to be a god called the Enlightenment, a deity of Reason. Now, please do not get me wrong, I believe that Mr. Beck has the best of intentions. I believe that he sincerely thinks that God is the answer for America. I also believe that Mr. Beck is not alone—there are many Americans, and yes, plenty of Christians, who believe that God is the answer for America and then proceed to form that god into whatever pleases them most. This is the reason why Mr. Beck's rally was a hit for some many people, and many among them, sadly, are church leaders. Yet, Scripture will not allow us to remake God into our own image—this is what He is supposed to be doing to us.

But, I digress. Back to Mr. Beck and the god called the Enlightenment. I believe he is basically trying to foster a moral, ethical movement that stands for things like honesty, integrity, truth, and nobility—you know, good, ol' fashioned morals—hoping that this will save America from its de-evolution. Essentially, he seems to promote morality without the bothersome requirement of bowing down to the One True God of the Bible.

This kind of a cart-before-the-horse thinking was rampant during the era of the Enlightenment. During the 18th and 19th centuries, the concept of God was altered. Instead of looking to the classical Biblical definition of God, these Enlightened thinkers deemed the task of defining who God is, practically unnecessary.

One of the products of the Enlightenment, which seems to be carried over and promoted by Mr. Beck, is stripping morality from the worship of God. Immanuel Kant, one the chief proponents of such Enlightened thinking in the 18th century, reverses the traditional order that morality only flows from a true concept of God. He, instead, believed that you could

acquire morality without God, because morality is rooted in reason. "It is reason, by means of its moral principles, that can first produce the concept of God."[{2}](#) Did you get it? Kant is claiming that morality establishes the concept of God. Additionally, Kant here is not referring to the One True God of the Bible; rather, it is a god that he has fashioned in his own mind. Basically, God is morality; and you can get morality by being sensible, rationale, reasonable, by looking within yourself.

Mr. Beck's gathering was a pep-rally encouraging people to look within themselves. Don't look to someone else, he proclaimed, we must "look inside ourselves."[{3}](#) He eloquently spoke of the "power of the individual" and the difference that you can make when "you look inside yourself."[{4}](#) Morality is attainable—not by worship of and communion with a holy, righteous God—but by examining your reasonable self. I believe that Mr. Beck's libertarian political philosophy is not merely the way he sees politics—it is the way he sees all of life.

But we see Scripture providing an altogether different viewpoint—or might I say, worldview. It tells us that men's hearts are deceitful, in fact, so much so that not even the individual himself or herself can know it. It tells us that the belief and worship of God is directly tied to how we live. Wrong beliefs lead to wrong living, overall. The Bible tells us not to look within ourselves for the solution, but to look to the cross: to look to the true God and his guilt-sacrifice on our behalf. And then it tells us to look toward the community—the church of God—in order to live a holy, moral, ethical life; not so that we can become good patriots, but so that we can become good children of God, and thus more fully human. The end result will be virtuous people living together in harmony.

The bottom line is that faith counts. Looking to God for morality is both Biblical and essential. But many within the Christian community seem to ignore this important fact when

they are presented with a celebrity that seems to give voice to their political and moral values. Two leading evangelicals, when commenting about Mr. Beck's gathering to Christianity Today, ignore the ultimacy of faith. "Glenn Beck's Mormon faith is irrelevant,"{5} cried one; while the other proclaimed that Mr. Beck will be seen by evangelicals "as a moral voice, not necessarily a spiritual voice."{6} But I ask once again: can morality and spirituality be divorced from one another? Is faith really irrelevant? No, and no.

What is Honor?

But another question regarding Mr. Beck's gospel is, What does it mean to be honorable? His rally was called "Restoring Honor" and he obviously lauds the idea of honor, but he never defines it. He joked at the rally that America's shape was much like his weight and then added, "That ain't good."{7} So, if America is in such bad condition morally, and if America needs to be restored, what does it need to be restored to? These are all questions he leaves unanswered, yet I believe they are crucial questions from a Christian perspective.

But we may have more answers than we think. The one thing we do know is that Mr. Beck is a political animal. He has made a very nice living in talk radio as well as on television opining his political views. He is an unabashedly libertarian thinker, believing that small government is the best government, and that citizens deserve the highest amounts of freedom which they lose if government is too large. Thus, weak government equals strong individual freedom.

This, of course, is a legitimate political philosophy—one which many Americans believe in. Yet, Mr. Beck promotes his ideology with the fiercest possible rhetoric. He once queried about murdering Michael Moore: "I'm wondering if I could kill him myself, or if I would need to hire somebody to do it...I've lost all sense of right and wrong now. I used to be able to say, 'Yeah, I'd kill Michael Moore,' and then I'd see the

little [arm]band: What Would Jesus Do? And then I'd realize, 'Oh, you wouldn't kill Michael Moore. Or at least you wouldn't choke him to death.' And you know, well, I'm not sure." [\[8\]](#) His résumé also contains insults of the 9/11 victims' families wanting them to just "shut up," [\[9\]](#) calling Katrina victims "scumbags," [\[10\]](#) and probably most infamously, claiming that President Obama had "a deep-seated hatred for white people." [\[11\]](#)

So, what is honor? Is honor standing up for what you believe using the most hateful kinds of attacks to do it? Would Mr. Beck be able to call President Obama honorable? Or liberal filmmaker Michael Moore? Or oppositional political pundit Keith Olbermann? Does honor only reside on the political right? It seems that honor for Mr. Beck is not something that transcends politics, but something that is very political, quite partisan. I may be wrong; Mr. Beck's message about honor may be apolitical. But if that is the case, the messenger was flawed. The self-styled prophet who showed up that day at the Lincoln Memorial is a man whose public persona is so filled with partisan, vitriolic attacks upon people who disagree with him politically that it seems clear: "restoring honor" means ascribing to certain political views—his personal views. Yet honor is not about a political view; it transcends politics and should never be abused by being politicized. Unfortunately, Mr. Beck's message did just that.

Contrast that with the other folks who have been discussing, and yes, preaching about honor for thousands of years. Their message is pure; it is not hogtied to a political context, not confined to the simple, temporal issues of politics—rather, this message is concerned with the eternal. They are the countless preachers, teachers, pastors, church leaders who for centuries have been passing down a true message about honor. It is the Christian concept of honor. Yes, there is honor outside the Christian domain, but never does honor shine more than when it is a part of a Christian worldview. Our faith

defines honor and it defines to whom honor is due.

Paul does just that in his letter to Galatia when he writes: “But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control.”^{12} The very next verse ties what honor is to whom honor is due: “Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passion and desires” [emphasis mine].^{13} This is honor in its brightest colors. Living a life of worship to the true God—a life that is characterized by love and its eight subsequent characteristics: joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.

I believe that all of this can be summed up nicely by Paul’s words in the same letter when he writes, “if we live by the Spirit, let us walk by the Spirit.”^{14} Whether it is morality or honor, we must realize that this kind of walking can only be done when we are living by the Spirit. The moral, ethical system that Mr. Beck is looking for is located in the pages of Holy Scripture. It is not found by looking inside oneself; it is about looking at God’s rich Word. If you choose the first option, you will remain confused in sin; if you practice the second, you will accurately know what morality and honor is. You will indeed have the moral and spiritual power to live it out. That is the only hope for our country, as it is the only hope for any person or country. Maybe I am wrong about Mr. Beck—but until the Beckian revolution can tell us what honor is and what God we are supposed to turn toward—we should, from afar, keep shouting: “What the heck, Mr. Beck?”

Notes

1. Glenn Beck at the “Restoring Honor” Rally in Washington D.C., August 28, 2010. Video accessed at GlennBeck.com.
2. Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Practical Reason*.
3. Glenn Beck at the “Restoring Honor” Rally in Washington D.C., August 28, 2010. Video accessed at GlennBeck.com.

4. Ibid.
5. Jerry Falwell, Jr., President of Liberty University. *Christianity Today*, September 2010.
6. Lou Engle, Founder of "The Call." *Christianity Today*, September 2010.
7. Ibid.
8. The Glenn Beck Program, May 17, 2005.
9. The Glenn Beck Program, September 9, 2005.
10. Ibid.
11. Fox and Friends, Fox News Television, July 28, 2009.
12. Galatians 5:22–23.
13. Galatians 5:24.
14. Galatians 5:25.

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