

Those are sexy worldview glasses you've got there.

Feb. 3, 2011

E's email is a response to the post "[Glee-tastic!](#)"

Ms. McKenzie

Don't think Glee's overt sexuality has no effect on you. It is shaping you episode by episode. You are not immune.

Hi E,

Thanks for writing. I appreciate where you're coming from. Of course you're right. Whatever I watch shapes me. The question is, am I simply resigned to being shaped passively? Or do I have the option to take a more active role? I want you to know that I do not underestimate the power of our culture to shape us. That's why I work at a worldview ministry. Worldview goes a long way. The healthy view of sex I have intentionally pursued through study and prayer and practice and fellowship makes the nonsense often shown on screen unattractive, uninteresting, and particularly sophomoric. (Speaking of a holistic biblical worldview on sex, let me recommend Lauren Winner's excellent book, [Real Sex: The Naked Truth about Chastity](#)). Now, that being said, that does not mean that I am immune. I have to be careful (again: prayer, study, fellowship/community, repentance).

I also understand that not everyone has the same level of freedom to interact with various aspects of our unbelieving society. Everyone is different. There are certain things which are particularly spiritually unsafe for me—I know it in my guts and bones; I just can't go there. But I also know that doesn't mean it's as dangerous for others as it is for me, and

I don't begrudge others their freedom. Especially since it's so important to engage. Personal conviction derives from the way God has uniquely **created** us as individuals and how our singular personality and wiring is affected by the **Fall** – our particular tendencies, weaknesses, addictions, our circumstances, our personal history. The Apostle Paul calls us "ministers of reconciliation," those who bring back together what has been separated, which Romans tells us is people and all of creation, the combination of the two inevitably including what people create. The Church has, since its inception, chosen to reconcile, or **redeem** culture, generally, in five different ways (for more on this, see our article, ["Christians and Culture"](#)). And that's good. Diversity is good. Through it we better image God in all his vastness. Creation. Fall. Redemption. That is the framework we have for understanding the world; and because the Bible is true, it's also the most accurate understanding of the world. However, take out any part—creation, fall, redemption—and our vision is blurred.



Anyone who believes he or she is safe from the all the various temptations available in film is a fool. My colleague Todd wisely notes and advises, "Exercising rampant Christian freedom does not necessarily mean one is a strong Christian [referring to 1 Cor 8]. It could indicate that one is too weak to control one's passions and is hiding behind the argument that they are a stronger brother." If we choose to watch TV or movies at all, we must approach them through a "framework of moderation," to use Todd's phrase, that addresses *our particular weaknesses*, for we are all of us the weaker brother somewhere. "Teach me good discernment and knowledge, for I

believe in Your commandments” (Ps 119:66).

There is a difference between conviction and legalism. One of those differences is the legalistic compulsion to impose one’s personal convictions on others. It is possible to abstain from certain types of movies and shows, or even all movies and television, in a genuinely free way. I greatly admire my friends who abstain; who don’t even have a TV. Together we add to the richness of each others’ lives by bringing perspective to one another about who God is and how we relate to him. Together we present to the world a more complete picture. It is the diversity of the Body that most beautifully represents Christ to the world. It is vital to our Christian calling to live as much as we can in the tension between the pulls of legalism and libertinism. The ebb and flow of this kind of living is part of what it means to live the full, rich, abundant life of Christ.

With affection in our Lord Jesus,
Renea

This blog post originally appeared at
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Glee-wind: Grilled Cheesus

Oct. 16, 2010

Episode background: Major character Finn Hudson accidentally burns his grilled cheese sandwich, imprinting one side of it with the face of Jesus Christ. Finn takes this as a sign to take his nominal Christianity more seriously, irony intended by the writers it seems as Finn begins to pray to his sandwich which he now refers to as Grilled Cheesus. Every trivial and

selfish thing Finn asks of Grilled Cheesus comes to pass; meanwhile, Finn's Glee Club friend Kurt might be losing his father to heart disease – it doesn't dawn on Finn to pray for Kurt or his father; instead he prays that he might be quarterback again.

Most of the Glee kids turn to their faith in trying to deal with the news of Kurt's father and more poignantly, the immense pain of their friend. Kurt refuses to be comforted with his friends' prayers or anything which derives from religious faith, which he considers ridiculous, irrelevant, and ignorant.

So... Grilled Cheesus the sacred sandwich very well may be the most sacrilegious (and hilarious) thing since [Monty Python](#). But the episode as a whole really brought some very important spiritual issues to the table. Issues like: It's okay to publicly deny faith but not proclaim it. Conundrums like: You can't prove God doesn't exist and you can't prove he does. Problems like Hell; questions like: Why does it sometimes seem God answers prayers about winning football games but not about real human pain and suffering. It also highlights the fact that, for many, intellectual objections toward, and knee-jerk reactions against, religion are often on some level a shield protecting deeply painful, deeply real experiences: Sue's inability to pray hard enough to help her "handicapable" sister, Kurt's being rejected and marginalized and bullied by those who should love him most. Sure, both Sue and Kurt misunderstand certain aspects of God's nature and the way he works in the world. But so what? That can't really be addressed until we walk with them in their pain, like Mercedes does. Mercedes didn't give up on loving Kurt even after he rejected her and ridiculed her religion out of the abyss of his pain. She wasn't pushy. She just loved him. She "had [him] at 'fabulous hat'."

This episode seems to reject Sue's wrong, but widely held, understanding of separation of Church and State. The episode

seems to reject Kurt's aggressive atheism (so at least it's equal opportunity religious tolerance), growing him from this position to one that's more open – to others' spirituality and how that affects the way they inevitably relate to him if nothing else. "Grilled Cheesus" rejects the [moralistic therapeutic deism](#) rampant among Christian teens (and adults); and through Emma's talk with Finn it also rejects over-spiritualizing everything that happens. The episode affirms the reality of religious doubt and uncertainty and the often person-relative struggles of everyone's own spiritual journeying, which we should affirm. It affirms religious pluralism, which we reject. (See Bethany Keeley-Jonker's post at ThinkingChristian.com which makes [this](#) important point about Mercedes's pluralism.)

There's much, much more to dig out and explore in this episode, which isn't uncommon for *Glee*. And there are multiple possible interpretations among all that lies beneath, and that isn't uncommon for *Glee* either; things are often complicated and ambiguous. [You can't judge Glee by a single episode](#), or by what's on the surface. It's a project where characters and ideas are allowed to grow and develop in [real-life messiness](#).

This blog post originally appeared at reneamac.com/2010/10/16/glee-wind-grilled-cheesus/

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 marage [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.

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