

Title: A twisted heart (review of the new *Brideshead Revisited*)
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Date: 21 August 2008
Source: <http://www.breakpoint.org/listingarticle.asp?ID=8752>

On the surface, with its period settings and costumes, the new film *Brideshead Revisited* looks like a faithful adaptation of the classic novel by Evelyn Waugh. Underneath, it is anything but faithful. On the contrary, it presents a deeply flawed and inaccurate picture of the Christian faith that Waugh embraced.

Brideshead Revisited tells the story of the wealthy Flyte family as seen through the eyes of Charles Ryder, who attends Oxford with the troubled young Sebastian Flyte. Charles is an agnostic who cannot understand the Flytes' Catholic faith and the strong influence it has over all of them, even over the family members who rebel against it.

Even though these rebellious ones often seem happy, fulfilled, and free from restrictions, there is still something in them that craves the simple belief in God that they knew in their childhood. The book is ultimately the story of those lost family members gradually returning one by one to the Church. In the end, even the agnostic Charles finds himself drawn to the faith.

As Waugh wrote, *Brideshead* "deals with what is theologically termed 'the operation of Grace,' that is to say, the unmerited and unilateral act of love by which God continually calls souls to Himself." In short, grace and faith are at the very heart of the story.

But the movie makers seemed determined to do everything they could to undermine what Evelyn Waugh was trying to say. Original screenwriter Andrew Davies made headlines when he remarked that God would be the "villain" of his adaptation. Davies was later replaced by another writer, Jeremy Brock, who announced that God would not be the villain, but "theology" would. The story, to him, was largely about "religious guilt."

True to Brock's words, the film paints a very different picture of the Catholic faith than Waugh did. The religion of grace that he portrayed so powerfully in his novel is now shown in the movie as stifling and oppressive. Waugh was honest in his depiction of devout Christians as three-dimensional individuals with both faults and virtues, but the film portrays them as outright villains and fools.

The end of the book has Charles Ryder praying in the chapel at Brideshead. The film shows no such scene. Instead, it ends with Charles almost snuffing out the candle burning before the altar, then thinking better of it and walking away. Maybe that is the filmmaker's way of showing at least a grudging respect for religion. But given the film's poisonous portrayal of the Flyte family's faith, I doubt it.

As Barbara Nicolosi of the Christian filmmakers' program Act One puts it, "Every scene in the movie had the settings from the book, but with a twisted heart."

Even the *New York Times* got it right in its review of the movie. And I quote: "In Waugh's book . . . religious commitments and social relations were part of a thickly detailed, complicated and ancient lived reality. . . [T]his is what makes 'Brideshead Revisited' live and breathe as a novel. None of it registers with any force in this lazy, complacent film, which takes the novel's name in vain."

That is why the film is not worth your time. If your friends invite you to see the movie, instead invite them to read the book with you . . . so you can remind them that the Christian faith is not about guilt, but about grace.

For Further Reading and Information

Gina Dalfonzo, "[Brideshead Revised](#)," *The Point*, 24 July 2008.

Learn more about [Brideshead Revisited](#) or [purchase the book](#) at Amazon.com.

A. O. Scott, "[Bright Young Things in Love and Pain](#)," *New York Times*, 25 July 2008.

"[What I've Done to Brideshead](#)," *Telegraph* (London), 1 June 2007.

Jeffrey Gantz, "[Brideshead Reinterpreted](#)," *Boston Phoenix*, 23 July 2008.

Barbara Nicolosi, "[Brideshead Eviscerated](#)," *Church of the Masses*, 2 August 2008.