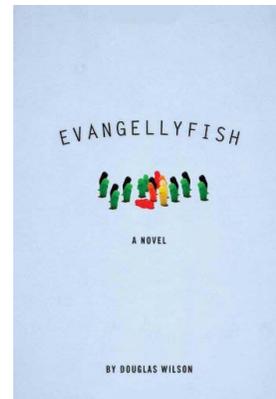

Douglas Wilson. *Evangellyfish*. Moscow, ID: Canon, 2012. 228 pp. \$21.00.

So far this year I've read eight books by Douglas Wilson, and reading him usually evokes one of three responses:

1. I strongly agree. Witty, pithy, insightful. I wish I would've written that.
2. I strongly agree, but an improved tone could win others over. (Think Tim Keller.)
3. I strongly disagree, and the tone is off-putting. (For example, in March 2012 he [called](#) the NIV a "gender bender" translation, asking, "Who wants a Bible translation with hormone shots and breast implants?")



Evangellyfish evokes the first two responses but with a few caveats.

The book is unlike any other I've read by Wilson: it's a novel, and it's satire. Wilson's other writings have doses of satire, but this is 228 pages of non-stop satire. I don't want to give away the storyline, so I'll be vague on those details. Basically, the book is a story of two pastors: (1) a sleazy, sex-crazed mega-church pastor and (2) a faithful, down-to-earth Reformed Baptist pastor with an MDiv from Westminster Theological Seminary. And there are lots of other colorful characters.

On the one hand, this book may not be for you. First, it's preoccupied with sex. Though it contains nothing explicit, many (most?) scenes are suggestive. Second, it includes realistically coarse language when depicting what crude characters are thinking or saying: e.g., "Who the hell" (p. 21), "what the hell" (p. 99), and "damn" (pp. 24, 35, 111, 156, 179 [2x], 192, 209). Third, Wilson directs his satire almost exclusively at mega-churches in generic evangelicalism. Hardly any of the barbs hit close to home for conservative evangelicals who are robustly confessional. Even worse, the book may instill a prejudice in those readers and tempt them to look down on or be suspicious of all large churches in vanilla evangelicalism as being led by slick hypocrites and filled with superficial attenders.

On the other hand, *Evangellyfish* may be just what you're looking for. Like almost everything Wilson writes, it's witty, funny, and edifying. Especially edifying are the end of the story and how he portrays

the Reformed Baptist pastor's marriage and family. While this novel depicts sin, it doesn't glorify it; sin is dark and has miserable consequences in this life.

Here are some examples of Wilson's humorous verve:

- "Mitchell's mother had always called church choirs the war department. Luther once said that when Satan fell, he fell into the choir loft" (p. 12).
- "[H]is pulpit ministrations had left the congregation in an exhausted frame of mind, and parishioners would go home after the message, recline on the sofa, and pant" (p. 67).
- "[S]he was one of those rare individuals whose wise and sagacious appearance was immediately contradicted as soon as she opened her mouth" (p. 74).
- "Johnny was not really a highly trained logician, and would simply go as he was directed, as long as the suggested direction did not conflict with the tangled bundle of platitudes, loosely tied with string, that made up his worldview" (p. 100).
- "Michelle was a smart woman, but it must also be said she had always been a 'will that be on the test?' kind of smart" (p. 105).
- "[T]he repercussions did not seriously affect Chad's ministry at all. In fact, he got a book deal with Zondervan out of it—*Walking With Christ Through Divorce*" (p. 108).
- "[A]fter repeating several phrases unnecessarily (the sermonic equivalent of a blinking fuel gauge), John decided that he had to wrap up. He didn't feel any better. He felt like he had just tried to give a tar baby a bath in vegetable oil. Lester didn't look any cleaner, and John just felt gunked" (p. 140).
- "Pastoral snarls are like the mercies of God—they are new every morning" (p. 175).
- "[T]hat kind of anger is like manna. Even if it is good, it goes bad overnight if you try to keep it" (p. 224).

Wilson said in one interview, "I want this book to come across to intelligent readers as 'funny, dark, and redemptive.'" By those criteria, he succeeded.

Andrew David Naselli
The Gospel Coalition
Moore, South Carolina, USA