

Contemporary Christian Fiction

Deb's Definition of "Christian Fiction": This term describes an easily recognizable and highly marketed subset of books that is labeled as "Christian Fiction" by its publishers, authors, booksellers, and readers. Books from Christian publishing houses like Bethany House, Tyndale, etc. dominate the genre, for many readers their products are synonymous with the term "Christian Book". A writer working with these publishing houses operates under certain constraints; they must generally accept the Publisher's statement of faith and portray faith in Jesus as the answer to life's dilemmas. There are often certain "taboos" or offensive content that they are not allowed to write about.

Appeal Factors:

- *Parochialism—created for the safely defined boundaries of a certain community.
- *Promote strong values. *Teach a lesson *Happy Ending, Good prevails over evil
- *Adhere to a code of decency--this is changing & some are getting edgier (especially in terms of violence & blood & gore), but there are still boundaries that won't be crossed, especially in regards to sexuality and language.
- *Typical remarks from readers: Christian books leave me feeling hopeful, I enjoy getting a lesson about how to live out my faith along with a great story, I want to avoid the sex, language, etc. of mainstream fiction.

Tips for talking to patrons/writing reviews: When reviewing or talking to patrons about Christian fiction, consider how to discuss the Christian/spiritual aspect. Readers often have strong preferences about how "preachy" they would like their reading to be. In some Christian fiction books the faith of the characters is a subtle undertone, in others it comes across forcefully. Sentences like "The main character spends several scenes sharing his spiritual beliefs with other characters" will help readers make a more informed decision. Some Christian Fiction is less gentle than others, and readers often appreciate a "heads up" about that as well.

A list of Christian publishers, and Awards

Associations and Trade Publications

Christian Bookselling Association

<http://www.cbaonline.org>

Good source of news and information about the Christian bookselling industry.

Evangelical Christian Publishing Association

www.ecpa.org

Every year this association publishes a list of their chosen award winners by Christian publishers. You can also get bestseller lists and a see which publishing houses belong to the association.

Christian Retailing

<http://www.christianretailing.com/>

Trade magazine for those in the Christian retail industry, their website and e-newsletter are a great source of industry news.

Publishers (note: I have made this a broad list, including some mainstream religious publishers outside of the evangelical Christian market).

Books for the Soul: Contemporary Christian Fiction at Your Library
Deborah Bryan, Topeka & Shawnee County Public Library

Barbour Publishing, Inc.

www.barbourbooks.com

Publishes gentle fiction authors like Wanda Brunstetter and MaryLu Tyndall

Bethany House Publishers

www.bethanyhouse.com

Bethany House (a division of **Baker**) is a large publisher of Christian fiction. The site includes listings of their series. They focus on historical fiction but also have some romantic suspense.

B & H Publishing Group (formerly Broadman and Holman)

<http://www.bhpublishinggroup.com/>

A division of Lifeway Christian Resources which is affiliated with the Southern Baptist Convention

David C. Cook Communications

<http://www.davidccook.com/>

Publishes some edgier content, like supernatural fantasy and intense suspense.

dbryan@tspcl.org

Covenant Communications

www.covenant-lds.com/

A Mormon publishing house, click on "online store" to browse their selections.

Deseret

<http://deseretbook.com/store/>

A Mormon publishing company that has a lot of selections.

Harlequin: Inspirational Fiction

<http://www.harlequin.com/store.html?vclid=35>

Includes author profiles and upcoming releases for the Love Inspired, Love Inspired Suspense, Steeple Hill Café (Chick-Lit) and Steeple Hill Women's Fiction

Harvest House

www.harvesthousepublishers.com/

Romance, Amish, Mystery, and Suspense.

Hachette Book Group: Faithwords and

Center Street are their Christian imprints.

Some of their books are "edgier"; Publisher of "The Shack".

<http://www.hachettebookgroup.com>

Herald Press

<http://www.mph.org/hp/>

A Mennonite publishing company, features the popular "Ellie's People" series.

Howard Books (Simon & Schuster)

Traditional C.F. and Christian Non-fiction

<http://imprints.simonandschuster.biz/howard>

Ignatius Press

<http://www.ignatius.com/>

Catholic books, including some fiction

Kregel Publications

<http://www.kregel.com/>

Smaller publisher

Marcher Lord Press

<http://www.marcherlordpress.com/>

Specializes in fantasy, science fiction, and "just weird" titles.

Moody Publishers: RiverNorthFiction

<http://www.moodypublishers.com>

<http://www.rivernorthfiction.com/>

Amid gentler titles they also have gritty suspense and titles by African American publishers

Oasis Audio

<http://www.oasisaudio.com/>

Audiobook publisher which specializes in Christian books.

Paraclete Press

<http://www.paracletepress.com/>

A non-denominational Christian press that features books from Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant points of view.

Revell Books (A division of Baker Publishing)

www.revellbooks.com

Wide range, from gentle to supernatural fantasy

Shadow Mountain

<http://www.shadowmountain.com/>

A division of the Mormon publisher Deseret, that focuses on "value based" but non-religious products. One of their most well known books is the Wednesday Letters.

Thomas Nelson (Harper Collins)

www.thomason.com

Runs the gamut from Amish fiction to the supernatural thrillers of Ted Dekker and even Science Fiction/Fantasy titles

Tyndale House Publishers

<http://www.tyndalefiction.com/>

Includes guides for book discussion groups

Urban Christian

www.urbanbooks.net/Urban-Christian/index.html

An imprint of Urban books, they reflect the modern African American culture. Expect them to be frank about sexuality and the grittier side of life.

Walk Worthy Press

http://www.hachettebookgroup.com/features/halla/walk_worthy.html

Specializes in Christian fiction and Christian Living books for African Americans

Waterbrook Multnomah Publishing (The

Christian division of **Random House**)

www.randomhouse.com/waterbrook/

Wide range, from gentle to supernatural fantasy

Zondervan (Harper Collins)

<http://www.zondervan.com>

Traditional C.F. like Karen Kingsbury

Awards

Carol Awards

<http://www.acfw.com/carol>

Given by the American Christian Fiction Writers Association for the best Christian Fiction published by traditional publishing houses. The award is given in several categories.

Christy Awards

www.christyawards.com

Named in honor of Catherine Marshall's novel "Christy", these awards focus on the best in Christian fiction and include several categories like romance, historical, futuristic, etc.

Evangelical Christian Publishing Association's Christian Book Awards

<http://www.ecpa.org/awards.php>

This publishing association has given out awards since 1978, looking at the winners in the "Fiction" category gives you a glimpse of the history of the genre.

Rita Awards

<http://www.rwanational.org/>

The Rita (Romance Writers of America) awards include an award for best inspirational romance

Christianity Today Book Awards

<http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/special/bkawards.html>

Given every year for both fiction and nonfiction

Websites

www.christianbook.com —The Christian Amazon— great for looking up subcategories of fiction

www.faithfulreader.com —Great features, updated monthly, e-mail newsletter

<http://www.familyfiction.com/>

Fantastic resource for seeing what is new and to read articles about authors and current trends—the free monthly digital magazine is definitely worth subscribing to

Review Sources

Library Journal frequently has a special section of Christian Fiction reviews

<http://www.libraryjournal.com/>

Books for the Soul: Contemporary Christian Fiction at Your Library
Deborah Bryan, Topeka & Shawnee County Public Library

Publishers Weekly reviews Christian fiction but it is often mixed in with the general fiction, I usually scan the publishers to see what Christian fiction has been reviewed. Occasionally they will do a theme issue on religious publishing and that issue is usually chock full of helpful statistics, news and reviews.

<http://www.publishersweekly.com/>

Booklist also reviews Christian fiction, but again you have to look through the general fiction and scan for Christian publishers. Occasionally they will do a theme list of their top Christian fiction picks.

<http://www.booklistonline.com/>

Connecting with Christian Fiction authors

Christian Authors Network

<http://www.christianauthorsnetwork.com/>

Their website has lots of useful information including previews of books and contact info for authors.

American Christian Fiction Authors

<http://www.acfw.com/>

I have made a lot of useful contacts with authors through being a part of the ACFW online book group, which discusses one Christian fiction novel each month; lots of authors are a part of this group.

Writes of Passage Blog

<http://writespassage.blogspot.com/>

Enter into the minds and hearts of five Christian Fiction authors as they share their lives on this blog. One of them, Judith Miller, is a local (Topeka) favorite. They often have other authors do guest posts.

Local (Kansas) Christian fiction authors

Deb Raney from Moundridge Kansas,

<http://www.deborahraney.com/>,

debraney@mac.com, (620) 354-7494

Judith Miller from Topeka,

www.judithmccoymiller.com, jamauthor@cox.net;

Deborah Vogts from Southeast Kansas,

debvogts@gmail.com

Stephanie Morrill, KC area, writes for teens. You can contact her through her website:

<http://stephaniemorrillbooks.com>

Kim Vogel Sawyer, Hutchinson, kimsawyer@cox.net

Patricia Davis, Wichita area,

<http://patriciadavids.com/>

dbryan@tspcl.org

HIGHLY RECOMMENDED CHRISTIAN FICTION AUTHORS:

All of these authors have won multiple awards or gotten numerous starred reviews

Lynn Austin – writes historical and some contemporary women’s fiction, has won 8 Christy awards.

Ted Dekker –Has a reputation for spinning tales filled with the supernatural & fantasy elements, his newer books are particularly dark & violent. Often other writers whose tales are “dark” are compared to him.

Bodie and Brock Thoene –have written over 65 historical fiction novels since the mid 1980’s—for which they have won numerous ECPA awards

Susan May Warren—Strong female characters populate her romances—whether contemporary, suspenseful, or historical.

Robin Lee Hatcher –writes stories of faith, courage, and love featuring strong female characters in both historical and contemporary settings.

Angela Ewell Hunt –writes a variety of fiction, from the “chick lit” type “Doesn’t She Look Natural” to the creepy allegory “Uncharted”, and books for teens and children.

Deborah Raney—Kansas author who writes contemporary romances that often deal with family issues.

Francine Rivers –Is known for making the jump from the romance genre to C.F., she writes romance and historical novels and her Redeeming Love is a “classic” of the genre.

Tamera Alexander –Her historical romance series set in the west (the “Fountain Creek Chronicles”) has been a huge success with readers and critics

Davis Bunn –(Also writes as “T. Davis Bunn”). His writing reminds me a lot of John Grisham, but he does not just do Legal thrillers, he also writes regular thrillers, romances, and historicals (co-written with Janette Oke).

Brandilyn Collins –writes suspense with a touch of romance, Dee Henderson and Terri Blackstock are similar

Tracy Groot –writes powerful historical fiction, many set in Biblical times and related to Biblical stories

Athol Dickson –writes introspective novels with a touch of “magical realism” where miracles show up in unexpected places and people.

Karen Hancock –One of the few fantasy and science fiction authors in Christian fiction, her Legends of the Guardian King series is fantastic

Jan Karon –Her Mitford series is the very definition of a “gentle read”. Although published by a mainstream publisher, her books reflect Christian values and are still enormously popular among Christian fiction fans.

Beverly Lewis –Her gentle modern day novels set among the Amish are enormously popular

Lisa Samson –writes modern day fiction that both challenges the status quo and tells a compelling story

Melody Carlson –writes edgy fiction that deals with modern day issues; writes series for teens and children

Steven James --writes a series of excellently written thrillers (The Patrick Bowles files)

Deb's Favorites: Christian Fiction Titles I highly recommend



Zora and Nicky: A Novel in Black and White by Claudia Muir Burney

This character focused novel examines the issue of the relationship between the races in modern day US Christian circles. Nicky, the son of a prominent Baptist pastor, is sick of his father's hypocritical preaching and racially insensitive lifestyle. Zora, the daughter of a prominent African American bishop, is sick of her father's "prosperity gospel" messages. They meet at a Bible study group that welcomes all believers--even ex-prostitutes and recovering alcoholics--and thus begins a volatile yet passionate relationship.



Levi's Will by W. Dale Cramer

Meet Will McCrunder--also known as Will Mullet. Will changed his name after running away from home. He was raised old-order Amish by a father who is unyielding--so unyielding that when Will gets into trouble with a girl he doesn't want to face his father's wrath. Nor does he want to face the discipline of the Amish community, so he runs away and Tobe, one of his brothers, joins him. Will knows how to work hard, and this is how he survives in the world. Eventually he joins the Army, meets his future wife, Helen, and the reader follows his life as he eventually has to deal with his past and all the lies he has told people. The author has pulled from his own family experiences and crafted a poignant tale of families ripping apart and coming back together again.



Black (and sequels) by Ted Dekker

One man—two worlds. Thomas Hunter switches from one world to the next every time he falls asleep and dreams. In one world he is in our reality—in the year 2010. In the other he encounters malevolent black bats and is rescued by white bats—who can talk! They tell him he is dreaming of the 'histories', just before a mutated virus called the Raison strain wipes out most of the earth's population. Now Thomas has to decide which reality is real—or if both are—and fight two evils, the black bats, which seem to be a physical representation of evil and the evil doctor who wants to unleash the Raison Strain and control the world. This highly suspenseful and incredible story is followed in the series by *Red* and *White*.



River Rising by Athol Dickson

An isolated community on the southern tip of Louisiana receives an unusual visitor--the Rev. Hal Poser. Unusual happenings follow the Reverend, and he soon acquires the reputation of a miracle worker. After aiding a woman with a difficult childbirth, he is admired, but then suspicion falls on him after the woman's child disappears. Poser pokes around and discovers that over the years several infants in the area vanished unexplainably, and he embarks on a search to find out why. Filled with elements of Magical realism, this is one powerful story.



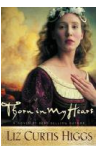
The Legends of the Guardian King series by Karen Hancock, starts with ***The Light of Eidon***

Christian Fantasy? Yes indeed, Karen Hancock has developed a rich fantasy series with sword wielding heroes, magic, and even a dragon or two—yet there is a decidedly Christian theme woven throughout. Abram, the son of a King, has no desire to rule—he only wants to devote his life to the service of Eidon (God). To that end he leaves his family to pledge himself to the service of the sacred flames—but a sudden betrayal forces him to realize his religious mentors may not be all that he thought they were—and that his destiny may require more than secluded devotion. He may, in fact, be called to become a King.



Grace at Low Tide by Beth Webb Hart

DeVeaux at fifteen should be enjoying all the comforts and concerns of a young woman descended from blue-blood in the south. But her father has squandered their money in shaky business deals and now they have been forced to move from their Charleston home to the caretaker's cottage on the family plantation. DeVeaux is only fifty miles away from her former life, but can hardly stand to go back and endure the looks from her former classmates when they wheel into town in their beat up, muddy truck. But she does have good friends in town though, especially at her church. And she needs all the support she can get, since her father is not taking his humiliation well at all. He is prone to bursts of temper that result in scenes where things get thrown into the nearby river--even Christmas trees. DeVeaux desperately needs God's help to love her family, but how long will it take for the Lord to work things out for them?



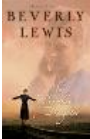
Thorn in My Heart by Liz Curtis Higgs

How can a story from the Bible be re-created in 18th century Scotland...and feel as if it was meant to be there all along? All the drama of the ancient Biblical story of Jacob and the two sisters who vied for his affection is set against the most romantic of backgrounds—and the result is magical. Readers who fancy a trip all things Scottish will lap up the many books Higgs has set there...and yearn for more.



The Lady of Milkweed Manor by Julie Klassen

In a historical setting similar to that of Jane Austen, a young gentlewoman is sent to a lying in hospital for unwed expectant mothers. Though the daughter of a pastor and a proper upbringing, she finds herself exposed to quite a different side of life due to her indiscretion. She has to depend on the generosity of others to survive, and make a heart wrenching decision about her baby. She also learns quite a bit about the duties of a milk-nurse, as she turns to that profession to support herself. Despite her circumstances, she also ends up with a choices to make between several potential suitors. This was a very enjoyable read, what I liked best about it is the historical details and feel and the emotional ups and downs of the story.



The Preacher's Daughter by Beverly Lewis

Annie Zook has quite a dilemma. As the daughter of an old order Amish preacher, she is forbidden to pursue her talent in art. But she is driven to continue secretly, hiding her art studio and masterpieces at an art studio. The only one who knows this is Annie's worldly pen pal Louisa, who has problems of her own after breaking off her engagement with her materialistic boyfriend. Louisa feels that she needs a change of pace and asks to come visit Annie and her family. Louisa's designer jeans make quite a splash in Amish country, though she soon adapts to the native dress. Annie is thrilled to have a fellow artist (Annie is an art teacher) but soon her dilemma about choosing her art or the Amish church comes to a head.



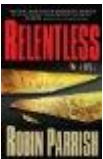
Hood by Steven Lawhead

We all know the familiar legend of Robin Hood who hangs out in Sherwood forest and steals from the rich to give to the poor. But what if the legends of Robin Hood were really based on a Welsh king who was deposed from his throne by the Norman Conquest in the early 1100's? That's the premise behind Hood, and the author's ability to capture the time period and its myth and lore make this adaptation outstanding.



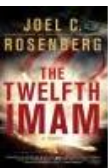
The Shape of Mercy by Susan Meissner

This novel packs a powerful punch as the reader gets drawn into the dramatic story of a young woman involved in the Salem witch trials. The story starts in the modern day, however, as Lauren--a college student with a trust fund--becomes intrigued by an ad posted on a school bulletin board. It is a help wanted ad for someone to transcribe a diary. Lauren answers the ad and despite the imposing nature of the diary's owner, Abigail Boyles, she gets the job and is thrilled to learn that the diary belonged to a young girl living in Salem during the time of the witch trials. What Lauren doesn't count on is how emotionally involved she will get with the story of Mercy, the author of the diary, and how it will affect her own life choices. This novel is so intriguing on many levels, but mainly because of the excellent job of capturing the drama of the Salem witch trials and the difficult choices that Mercy was faced with. Fans of well written Christian fiction and those who love history must read this one.



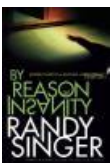
Relentless by Robin Parish

An intriguing supernatural twist and non-stop action had me gobbling up this thriller like it was chocolate candy. Grant Borrows gets the shock of his life when he glances across the street and sees--himself! It seems he has been 'shifted'--someone else is wearing his face while he is in a new body entirely unfamiliar to him. As Grant tries to discover what has happened to him he also receives a warning that his life is in danger. And indeed he seems to have pursuers who are trying to kill him, as well as strange new abilities that enable him to protect himself. At the bottom of it all is an ancient prophecy that has him at the center of a potentially earth shattering game of danger and wits. The fast paced action combined with the conspiracy that the main character has to unravel had me not wanting to put this one down for a second. Fans of Ted Dekker and Frank Peretti have a new Christian supernatural thriller author to add to their lists!



The Twelfth Imam by Joel Rosenberg

Rosenberg has an eerie way of forecasting future trends. His well written political thrillers examine the current issues causing conflict in the Middle East. In The Twelfth Imam a young man is sent into Iran as a covert operative for the CIA. His mission is to discover if they are building nuclear weapons. Along the way he and the reader discover what is driving the current Iranian regime...and the horrific potential for destruction if certain elements get their way.



By Reason of Insanity by Randy Singer

Catherine O'Rourke is just as surprised as everyone else in her life when she starts having visions that reveal details about a series of serial kidnappings/murders. Catherine is no stranger to police investigations, having even gone to jail to protect the identity of her inside police source. But her ties with the police can't keep her out trouble when the cops decide that the only way she could know these details about the killings is that she is the serial killer herself. I could hardly wait to see how the author was going to get Catherine out of the deep hole of incriminating evidence against her. The twists and turns were fantastic. Fans of legal or other thrillers should definitely pick this one up