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## A Birthday Party You Might Miss

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I recently discovered that I share a birth year with Barbara Millicent Roberts. We will both turn fifty this year, but her birthday comes first. From what I have seen of her in recent media appearances, she isn't showing many signs of age.

Then again, Barbara Millicent Roberts is a doll. Seriously, a real doll. Most people know her by the name "Barbie," and she has been a controversial figure from the start. Her full name was revealed in a series of authorized novels published in the 1960s.

Growing up as a boy, I knew of Barbie the way girls knew of G.I Joe — mostly by incessant television advertisements. The Mattel company presented Barbie as a portrait of idealized womanhood. Over the last half-century, millions of girls played with Barbie dolls, bought Barbie accessories, and fantasized about being Barbie.

The history of Barbie is the stuff of toy marketing legend. Barbie was based on a German doll, and the toy was crafted to allow girls to play with a "grown-up" figure. Over the past five decades, Barbie has been packaged in various ethnic versions and the product line has changed with the times.

Controversy has followed Barbie through the years. Many parents complained that Barbie was too "anatomically correct" and sexually suggestive. Feminists complained (rightly it turns out) that Barbie's physical dimensions are both exaggerated and humanly impossible. In Saudi Arabia, the government's Committee for the Propagation of Virtue and Prevention of Vice once denied Barbie entrance into the kingdom, complaining that she is "Jewish, with revealing clothes and shameful postures." As [National Public Radio](#) reports, there has never been a Jewish version of Barbie.

As for the "revealing clothes and shameful postures" — those are rather hard to hide or deny.

The real problem with Barbie is the one often cited by feminists, but they see only the surface dimensions of the issue. Without doubt, Barbie represents the objectification and commodification of an exaggerated vision of female beauty. She is everything many feminists charge, and they are probably right in seeing Barbie as a problem for many girls. They want to look like Barbie and emulate her fictional lifestyle (also projected by Mattel through advertising and the marketing of accessories.)

As some feminists complain, few girls will grow up to look like Barbie. As a matter of fact *no* girls will grow up to look like Barbie. Her exaggerated features are just not within the human range of proportion.

Conservative Christians have been rightly concerned about Barbie's in-your-face sexuality. Her immodest dress and romanticized patterns of presentation leave little room for the imagination.

But the most basic problem with Barbie is the fact that she lies. Constantly. The entire Barbie package presents one huge lie about the nature of true beauty. According to the Christian worldview, beauty and truth and goodness are identical. A lie cannot be beautiful and the truth is never ugly. Barbie's total presentation represents a lie about feminine beauty, suggesting in not-too-subtle ways that external attractiveness (even artificial attractiveness) is the foundation of



true beauty.

But, according to the biblical worldview, genuine beauty is found within — in the being and character of a person — not in their external appearance. The first principle of human beauty is the fact that every human being, male and female, is made in God’s image. No one made in God’s image can be anything less than beautiful. Nevertheless, one of the signs and consequences of the Fall is that we are all too confused about true beauty. We are too easily bought off with the “pretty” at the expense of the beautiful. Furthermore, our notions of the “pretty” are themselves evidence of the Fall.

The second principle of the biblical worldview concerning beauty is that it is a function of the person’s character, not external appearance. Some of the most beautiful people ever to have walked the planet have fallen far short of prevailing standards of prettiness. Conversely, many of the people who have been most pretty in popular perception have been devoid of demonstrated moral character and spiritual graces.

Barbie turns fifty this month, but she doesn’t show it. Meanwhile, the girls who first played with Barbie dolls are now over fifty themselves. Millions of them have grown up to be women of virtue and character, raising families and serving others. By now, many show some signs of aging and the passage of time. Yet, in their faces and lives we see far more beauty than Barbie has ever been able to muster — then or now.

So, Barbara Millicent Roberts is turning fifty. I won’t expect an invitation to her big party.

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