

Violence, Culture and Meaning: A Biblical Response to the Dark Knight Massacre

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- I. Introduction
 - a. Shortly after midnight this past Friday morning, a 24-year-old man walked into a movie theater in Aurora, Colorado wearing a gas mask and bullet proof gear and opened fire on the packed audience of the latest Batman movie: *The Dark Knight Rises*
 - b. In all 12 people were killed and nearly 60 more wounded.
 - c. Our nation was stunned by the senseless violence and grieves for those lost loved ones
 - d. For those in this community who experienced a similar tragedy just over five years ago, I am sure these recent events hit especially hard.
 - e. As with most human tragedies, a prominent question is “Why?” and often-times there is no definitive answer
 - f. But I wanted to talk with you this morning about some of the issues raised by the shooting and the surrounding events that God’s people should be aware of, and which our society needs to really face
- II. KEY THOUGHT: I want to share three primary observations that we as God’s people can make in response to the Dark Knight Massacre and similar tragedies
- III. We must offer Prayer, Comfort and Good Deeds for the Suffering
 - a. James 5:16 – Pray for one another, that you may be healed.
 - b. Mat. 5:43-44 – Pray for those who are responsible for this wickedness
 - c. Rom 12:15 – Weep with those who weep
 - d. Gal 6:10 – Do good to all
 - e. Matt. 25:37-40 – Good deeds done for the afflicted are done for Jesus
- IV. There is something wrong with a society that demands brutal, perverse cruelty for its entertainment
 - a. Dark Knight Review
 - i. In the summer of 2008, the previous Batman movie was being released, and some were asking the question, where is our society headed if this is what it demands for entertainment?
 - ii. A insightful review, appeared in the British newspaper, *The Telegraph*, by a professional movie-critic **Jenny McCartney** raising some very important issues that seem even more important after these recent events.
 - iii. She said that the greatest surprise about that movie was “the sustained level of intensely sadistic brutality throughout the film.”
 - iv. “The film begins with a heist carried out by men in sinister clown masks. As each clown completes a task, another shoots him point-blank in the head. The scene ends with a clown – The Joker – stuffing a bomb into a wounded bank employee's mouth.”

- v. She goes on to describe more of the appalling instances of violence in the movie. "It is all intensely realistic. Oh but don't worry, folks: there isn't any nudity"
- vi. "The director, Christopher Nolan, hasn't sought to ramp up the cartoonish aspects of his superhero story, as other directors before him have. He has tried instead to make the violence and fear as believable as possible, and in this he has succeeded."
- vii. She talks about the British movie ratings board's past attempts to prevent violent films, like the 2002 movie *Spider-Man*, from being seen by the young, and how they have over the years caved into to public demands to lower the ratings so that younger and younger children can be exposed to these films
- viii. *Spider-Man* now looks like *Bambi* when set next to *The Dark Knight*. Even since 2002, the public's willingness to expose children to previously unthinkable levels of screen violence has soared, and the [British ratings board] finds itself virtually powerless to stop it.
- ix. "... we know that entertainment aimed at young people is becoming markedly more violent. My generation was terrified by the Child Catcher in *Chitty Chitty Bang Bang*; the current one is diverted with torture and agonising death"
- x. "The poet WB Yeats once wrote, 'In dreams begins responsibility', yet Hollywood will never take responsibility for its most brutal dreams so long as the paying public still flocks to the theatre of cruelty."
- xi. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/celebritynews/2461820/Our-attitude-to-violence-is-beyond-a-joke-as-new-Batman-film-The-Dark-Knight-shows.html>

b. My movie experience

- i. A very sheltered movie life as a child – for which I am thankful
- ii. When I began to be exposed to other movies as a young adult I saw a disturbing pattern in some the movies I was seeing
 - 1. It appeared that most of the movie was spend making the bad guy look so bad
 - 2. That you wouldn't mind watching him be murdered at the end of the movie
 - 3. It was clear that we as the audience were supposed to be cheering for the vengeful or vigilante execution of the villain at the end of the movie
- iii. But since that time there is another strong theme in our culture today
 - 1. Anti-heroes who are barely, if at all, better than the villains, or who routinely cross back and forth between the "good side" and the "bad side"
 - 2. More and more commonly, the villains are the heroes, and we are expected to root for them as they attempt to get away with their crimes and injustices.
- iv. This is a profound moral shift that says something very troubling about our society and those who grow up steeped in it

1. Jenny McCartney has noticed as well.
 2. "As a reviewer, I naturally understand that a degree of violence is an unavoidable force in cinema, as it is in life, and that a talented director can employ it to say something meaningful. Yet since 2000, when I first began reviewing films for *The Sunday Telegraph*, sporadic scenes have brought me up short, because they seemed to signal a sudden, significant shift in the director's moral perspective."
 3. She give some examples of perversely cruel actions taken by the characters who were supposed to be the heroes of the movies they were in.
 4. "Once, Quentin Tarantino was the edgy enfant terrible of Hollywood. Now he is a member of its establishment, encouraging younger, mainstream "torture porn" directors such as Eli Roth to push the boundaries of explicit, ingenious cruelty ever further.
 5. "Increasingly, extreme screen violence is used not as a necessary adjunct to a greater point, but as the pleasurable point in itself. "
- v. You may be unfamiliar with the term torture porn, but I think it is an apt one
1. Pornography gives the viewer perverse sexual pleasure without the risk and feelings of guilt associated with actually committing immoral sexual actions
 2. Torture porn gives some viewers perverse sadistic pleasure in seeing others suffer without the risk and feelings of guilt associated with actually acting cruel to others.
- c. If a person gets a taste for that sort of sadistic pleasure what happens to him?
- i. He may not shoot up a movie theatre, like James Holmes
 1. With a Joker hair-dye job
 2. Telling the police that arrested him that "he was the Joker, enemy of Batman" after the massacre ended.
 3. Showing no remorse, and thinking that he is acting in a movie, as one jail employee reported.
 4. Read more: <http://www.nydailynews.com/news/national/aurora-shooting-suspect-james-holmes-jailed-solitary-inmates-talking-killing-article-1.1119173#ixzz21J7Yxjx3>
 - ii. But how is he going to be able to fully appreciate things like
 1. Justice
 2. Mercy
 3. Compassion
 4. Forgiveness
 5. Grace
 - iii. What will his thought life be like?
 - iv. How will he treat others?
- d. Two societies
- i. The society of Noah's day
 1. Gen. 6:5-13

- ii. The society of God's people
 - 1. Phil. 4:8
 - iii. One of the major differences between these two societies is what they allow to enter their minds
 - 1. What they delighted to think about
 - 2. Only Evil continually
 - 3. Or things that are noble, virtuous and praiseworthy
 - e. Perhaps this tragedy will give our society a chance to reevaluate our standards of entertainment
 - i. ONE SMALL SIGN OF HOPE: Warner Brothers, the movie studio who released the Dark Knight film pulled the trailer for an upcoming gangster movie which included a scene in which gangsters shoot up a movie theater with a machine gun from behind the movie screen.
 - 1. It will be interesting to see if they scene from the movie
 - 2. Or pull the movie from production
 - 3. SOURCE: <http://www.deadline.com/2012/07/warner-bros-paired-dark-knight-rises-with-trailer-of-gangster-shooting-up-movie-theater-which-studio-didnt-take-down-until-i-complained/>
 - ii. I challenge each one of us to think about our own entertainment choices and consider if they reflect our Christian values
 - 1. We must be the salt and light of the world, but how can we season the world when our hearts, minds and spirits are already heavily seasoned with visions of
 - a. Perverse cruelty
 - b. Perverse sensuality
 - c. From the movie theatre, television, internet, novels and every other cultural outlet our society offers
 - iii. We need to start at home with ourselves
 - 1. Guarding our own hearts with all diligence
 - 2. And the hearts of our children
 - iv. And also be ready to encourage our friends and acquaintances to think about what the things that we watch for fun say about our values and character
 - v. If we go to the world for entertainment, we get what the world thinks is entertaining
- V. There is nothing that promotes senseless violence like living in a senseless universe
- a. We talked about this last week in discussing the secular naturalistic worldview that denies the existence of God and His relevance to human life
 - i. If a person accepts that view, then life becomes meaningless
 - ii. Nothing has a purpose, our existence is the result of chance and necessity, not reason or design

- iii. Therefore nothing that happens in our life really has reason or purpose, either
 - iv. Moral judgments are emptied of meaning as well
 - 1. So are feelings, such as love and hate
 - 2. Compassion and guilt
 - 3. They are just the result of hard-wired or random chemical actions and reactions in our purely physical non-spiritual bodies
 - v. When something good or bad happens in such a universe, why should anyone care?
 - vi. That is the nihilistic result of the worldview that is founded on naturalism
- b. In the fictional comic-book world of Batman, the ultra-rich Bruce Wayne, becomes a high-tech crime-fighter, fulfilling a vow he made after seeing his parents shot to death in an alley after leaving a movie theatre when he was a young boy.
- i. But in 1986, one comic writer took Batman's character in a new direction in his Dark Knight series of comics. This series is the inspiration for the three most recent Batman movies.
 - ii. Batman goes rogue, and eventually tries to kill both himself and Superman in a final showdown
 - iii. As he battles Superman, Superman tries to convince him to stop fighting and live.
 - iv. Batman refuses, making the following VERY, VERY relevant statement...
 - 1. *“My parents taught me a different lesson... lying on the street, shaking in deep shock, dying for no reason at all. They showed me that the world only makes sense when you force it to.”*
 - 2. *SOURCE: <http://www.darkknight.ca/storylines/tdkr.html>*
- c. Many people live in a godless, creatorless universe that has no purpose
- i. They only live to eat, sleep and be entertained by something that can make them care about something, anything, if only for a little while before they slip back into a sense of meaninglessness again
 - ii. Others have accepted that the world has no meaning in and of itself
 - 1. But they have determined that they will force it to have meaning
 - 2. For some this is a noble and somewhat tragic fight to do good and make a difference
 - a. When in reality according to their worldview
 - b. they believe that what they do doesn't really matter in a purposeless universe
 - 3. For others, forcing the world to have meaning means bending the world and other people to serve their vision of what the world should be
 - a. They create their own meaning

- b. And they only need power to bring that meaning to reality
- c. There is no God to stop them or hold them accountable
- d. Only other meaningless human beings who might get in their way
 - i. Not made in the image of God
 - ii. Not possessing eternal souls
 - iii. Accountable to no one other than themselves
- iii. In a world like this, senseless violence makes as much sense as anything else
 - 1. Rom. 1:28-32
- iv. May God help us if men come to power in our society who value brutality and cruelty as something to enjoy

VI. CONCLUSION

- a. A parallel between Gotham City and our world
 - i. In the fictional world of Gotham City, where Batman fights crime, tragedy struck when Batman's sidekick, Robin was killed. In despair and grief Batman retired from crime-fighting
 - ii. The 1986 Dark Knight Returns comic series depicts a Gotham City ten years later that has spiraled further and further into crime and violence. One example of how bad it has gotten is when a deranged man shoots up a movie theatre killing three people.
 - iii. Finally things get so bad that Batman returns to crime fighting to clean things up before he goes off the deep end himself.
- b. How long has our nation been without God? And what have been the results?
 - i. This is not a comic book. This is real life. People are really going out and shooting each other for no reason at all.
 - ii. Can we please finally conclude that the experiment of a society that does not honor God simply does not work?
 - iii. Do we want to continue in this direction another ten years and see what happens?
- c. Our world does not need vigilante crime-fighters, it needs Jesus Christ
 - i. No one else can bring Christ to the world except Christians
 - ii. And before Christ can influence the world, we, His people, must surrender ourselves to Him in every aspect of our lives.
- d. He is the One Who gives all things meaning
- e. He is the One Who will right every wrong and ensure every injustice is paid for
- f. He is the Savior and the Redeemer
- g. And He wants to be Your Lord
- h. INVITATION

Matthew 11:28-30 NASB "Come to Me, all who are weary and heavy-laden, and I will give you rest. 29 "Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and YOU WILL FIND REST FOR YOUR SOULS. 30 "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

