The Causes of War

Meic Pearse's book The Gods of War *gives great insight into the charge that religion is the cause of most war. History shows this is not true: the cause of most war is the sinful human heart, even when religion is invoked as a reason.*

The Accusation

Sam Harris, the popular author and atheist, says that "for everyone with eyes to see, there can be no doubt that religious faith remains a perpetual source of human conflict."{1} Writing for the Freedom from Religion Foundation, fellow atheist Richard Dawkins adds, "Only the willfully blind could fail to implicate the divisive force of religion in most, if not all, of the violent enmities in the world today."{2} Speaking more bluntly, one British government official has said, "theocrats, religious leaders or fanatics citing holy texts . . . constitutes the greatest threat to world peace today."{3}



War is the ultimate act of intolerance, and since intolerance is seen as the only unforgivable sin in our postmodern times, it's not surprising that those hostile to religion would charge people holding religious convictions with the guilt for causing war.

This view is held by many others, not just despisers of religion. A 2006 opinion poll taken in Great Britain found that 82% of adults "see religion as a cause of division and tension between people. Only 16% disagree."{4}

To be honest, religion has been, and remains, a source of conflict in the world; but to what degree? Is it the only source of war, as its critics argue? Is it even the primary source? And if we agree that religion is a source of war, how

do we define what qualifies as a religion? This leads to another question. Are all religions equally responsible for war or are some more prone to instigate conflict than others? Once these issues are decided, we are still left with one of the most difficult questions: How does a religious person, especially a Christian, respond to the question of war?

When confronted with the accusation that religion, and more importantly, Christianity, has been the central cause of war down through history, most Christians respond by ceding the point. We will argue that the issue is far too complex to merely blame war on religious strife. A more nuanced response is needed. Religion is sometimes the direct cause of war, but other times it plays a more ambiguous role. It can also be argued, as Karl Marx did, that religion can actually restrain the warring instinct.

In his provocative new book, *The Gods of War*, Meic Pearse argues that modern atheists greatly overstate their case regarding religion as a cause for war, and that all religions are not equal when it comes to the tendency to resort to violence. He believes that the greatest source for conflict in the world today is the universalizing tendencies of modern secular nations that are pressing their materialism and moral relativism on more traditional cultures.

The Connection Between Religion and War

When someone suggests a simple answer to something as complex as war, it probably is *too* simple. History is usually more complicated than we would like it to be.

How then should Christians respond when someone claims religion is the cause of all wars? First, we must admit that religion can be and sometimes is the cause of war. Although it can be difficult to separate political, cultural, and religious motivations, there have been instances when men went

off to war specifically because they believed that God wanted them to. That being said, in the last one hundred years the modern era with its secular ideologies has generated death and destruction on a scale never seen before in history. Not during the Crusades, the Inquisition, nor even during the Thirty Years War in Europe.

The total warfare of the twentieth century combined powerful advances in war-making technologies with highly structured societies to devastating effect. WWI cost close to eight and a half million lives. The more geographically limited Russian Civil War that followed the Bolshevik Revolution in 1917 resulted in nine million deaths. WWII cost sixty million deaths, as well as the destruction of whole cities by fire bombing and nuclear devices.

Both Nazi fascism and communism rejected the Christian belief that humanity holds a unique role in creation and replaced it with the necessity of conflict and strife. By the end of the nineteenth century, Darwin's ideas regarding natural selection and survival of the fittest had begun to affect philosophy, the social sciences, and even theology. Darwin had left us with a brutal universe devoid of meaning. The communist and fascist worldviews were both firmly grounded in Darwin's universe.

Hitler's obsession with violence is well known, but the communists were just as vocal about their attachment to it. Russian revolution leader Leon Trotsky wrote, "We must put an end once and for all to the papist-Quaker babble about the sanctity of human life." Lenin argued that the socialist state was to be "a system of organized violence against the bourgeoisie" or middle class. While critics of the Russian Tsar and his ties with the Orthodox Russian Church could point to examples of oppression and cruelty, one historian has noted that when the communists had come to power "more prisoners were shot at just one soviet camp in a single year than had been executed by the tsars during the entire nineteenth

century."{5}

So, religion is not the primary cause of warfare and cruelty, at least not during the last one hundred years. But what about wars fought in the more distant past; surely most of them were religiously motivated. Not really.

Meic Pearce argues that "most wars, even before the rise of twentieth century's secularist creeds, owed little or nothing to religious causation."{6} Considering the great empires of antiquity, Pearce writes that "neither the Persians nor the Greeks nor the Romans fought either to protect or to advance the worship of their gods."{7} Far more ordinary motives were involved like the desire for booty, the extension of the empire, glory in battle, and the desire to create buffer zones with their enemies. Each of these empires had their gods which would be called upon for aid in battle, but the primary cause of these military endeavors was not the advancement of religious beliefs.

Invasions by the Goths, Huns, Franks, and others against the Roman Empire, attacks by the Vikings in the North and the Mongols in Asia were motivated by material gain as well and not religious belief. The fourteenth century conquests of Timur Leng (or Tamerlane) in the Middle East and India resulted in the deaths of millions. He was a Muslim, but he conquered Muslim and pagan alike. At one point he had seventy thousand Muslims beheaded in Baghdad so that towers could be built with their skulls.{8}

More recently, the Hundred Years War between the French and English, the American Revolution, and the Napoleonic Wars were secular conflicts. Religious beliefs might have been used to wrap the conflicts with a Christian veneer, but promoting the cause of Christ was not at the heart of the conflicts.

Pearce argues that down through the millennia, humanity has gone to war for two main reasons: greed expressed by the

competition for limited resources, and the need for security from other predatory cultures. The use of religion as a legitimating device for conflict has become a recent trend as it became less likely that a single individual could take a country to war without the broad support of the population.

It can be argued that religion was, without ambiguity, at the center of armed conflict during two periods in history. The first was during the birth and expansion of Islam which resulted in an ongoing struggle with Christianity, including the Crusades during the Middle Ages. The second was the result of the Reformation in Europe and was fought between Protestant and Catholic states. Even here, political motivations were part of the blend of causes that resulted in armed conflict.

Islam and Christianity

Do all religions have the same propensity to cause war? The two world religions with the largest followings are Christianity and Islam. While it is true that people have used both belief systems to justify armed conflict, are they equally likely to cause war? Do their founder's teachings, their holy books, and examples from the earliest believers encourage their followers to do violence against others?

Although Christianity has been used to justify forced conversions and violence against unbelievers, the connection between what Christianity actually teaches and these acts of violence has been ambiguous at best and often contradictory. Nowhere in the New Testament are Christians told to use violence to further the Kingdom of God. Our model is Christ who is the perfect picture of humility and servant leadership, the one who came to lay down his life for others. Meic Pearce writes, "For the first three centuries of its history, Christianity was spread exclusively by persuasion and was persecuted for its pains, initially by the Jews but later, from 63, by the Romans."{9} It wasn't until Christianity

became the de facto state religion of the Roman Empire around AD 400 that others were persecuted in the name of Christ.

The history of Islam is quite different. Warfare and conflict are found at its very beginning and is embodied in Muhammad's actions and words. Islam was initially spread through military conquest and maintained by threat of violence. As one pair of scholars puts it, there can be no doubt that "Islam was cradled in violence, and that Muhammad himself, through the twenty-six or twenty-seven raids in which he personally participated, came to serve for some Muslims as a role model for violence."{10}

Much evidence can be corralled to make this point. Muhammad himself spoke of the necessity of warfare on behalf of Allah. He said to his followers, "I was ordered to fight all men until they say, 'There is no God but Allah.'"{11} Prior to conquering Mecca, he supported his small band of believers by raiding caravans and sharing the booty. Soon after Muhammad's death, a war broke out over the future of the religion. Three civil wars were fought between Muslims during the first fifty years of the religion's history, and three of the four leaders of Islam after Muhammad were assassinated by other Muslims. The Quran and Hadith, the two most important writings in Islam, make explicit the expectation that all Muslim men will fight to defend the faith. Perhaps the most telling aspect of Islamic belief is that there is no separation between religious and political authority in the Islamic world. A threat to one is considered a threat to the other and almost guarantees religiously motivated warfare.

Pacifism or Just Wars?

Although most Christians advocate either pacifism or a "just war" view when it comes to warfare and violence, Pearse argues that there are difficulties with both. Pacifism works at a personal level, but "there cannot be a pacifist state, merely

a state that depends on others possessed of more force or of the willingness to use it."{12} Some pacifists argue that humans are basically good and that violence stems from misunderstandings or social injustice. This is hardly a traditional Christian teaching. Pearse argues that "a repudiation of force in all circumstances . . . is an abandonment of victims—real people—to their fate."{13}

Just war theory as advocated by Augustine in the early fifth century teaches that war is moral if it is fought for a just cause and carried out in a just fashion. A just cause bars wars of aggression or revenge, and is fought only as a last resort. It also must have a reasonable chance of success and be fought under the direction of a ruler in an attitude of love for the enemy. It seeks to reestablish peace, not total destruction of the vanquished, and to insure that noncombatants are not targeted.

However, even WWII, what many believe to be our most justified use of force, failed to measure up to this standard. Massive air raids against civilian populations by the Allies were just one of many violations that disallow its qualification as a just war. As Pearse argues, "war has an appalling dynamic of its own: it drags down the participants . . . into ever more savage actions."{14}

How then are Christians to think about war and violence? Let's consider two examples. In the face of much violent opposition in his battle for social justice, Martin Luther King said, "be ye assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. . . . We shall so appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win *you* in the process."{15} Reform was achieved, although at the cost of his life, and many hearts and minds have been changed.

However, another martyr, German minister Dietrich Bonhoeffer, rejected pacifism and chose to participate in an attempt on the life of Adolf Hitler, mainly because he despaired that an

appeal to the hearts and minds of the Nazis would be effective.

Neither King nor Bonhoeffer were killed specifically for their faith. They were killed for defending the weak from slaughter, as Pearse puts it. Perhaps Pearse is correct when he argues, "If Christians can . . . legitimately fight . . . , then that fighting clearly cannot be for the faith. It can only be for secular causes . . . faith in Christ is something for which we can only die—not kill. . . . To fight under the delusion that one is thereby promoting Christianity is to lose sight of what Christianity is."{16}

Notes

1. Meic Pearse, The Gods of War (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2007), 16.
2. Ibid., 15.
3. Ibid.
4. Ibid., 14.
5. Ibid., 31.
6. Ibid., 53.
7. Ibid., 54.
8. Ibid., 55.
9. Ibid., 134.
10. Ibid., 58.
11. Ibid., 59.
12. Ibid., 173.
13. Ibid., 175.
14. Ibid., 173.
15. Ibid., 180.
16. Ibid.

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The Hunger Games: A Hunger, a Game, or a Calculated Viewing Option for Christians?

Have you seen the film *The Hunger Games (HG)*? Read the trilogy? What is your view of its legitimacy as entertainment fare? Its literary value or concerns regarding its brutal theme? As the movie with the third–best cinematic opening weekend in history and a universal buzz to match, this surprising piece of popular culture demands a response. I want to discuss two somewhat opposed responses Christians may take. I believe you can make a case for either one. What matters is *why* you choose and what to do with the story.

The film has been called *American Idol* meets *Lord of the Flies* for its unholy melding of pseudo–gladiatorial games with live reality TV–complete with elimination, only this type of competitive elimination is indeed Roman–styled: it's permanent. What's more, these are not hardened, adult warriors battling it out. Young teenage "tributes" from each district fight to the death within a mountainous domed "arena" while a viewing public ogles. Producers create real–time obstacles using godlike technology to up the ante and provide deadly tension. The whole thing is designed as a reminder of the rebellion that preceded the oppressive, dystopian government's stranglehold on its citizen subjects. Yet, the film (and reportedly the books) contains inherent appeal to some moral high ground and redemption. Are there compelling reasons for Christians to seek common ground with movie–goers who share faith as well as those who don't?

I think so, but first, some cautions, observations about audiences and points that require discernment.

A Brief Case for Critique and Avoidance

Kid–on–kid violence is just plain evil:

My initial concerns about the *HG* film centered on two things: its barbarous plot line of child–on–child executions together with its allure to children younger than the intended teen audience. I asked a group of high school seniors in a worldview–based Christian school discussion if they could, for the moment, suspend defense of their film viewing rights and agree that there was something deeply disturbing *in and of itself* about that theme: kids killing kids. They showed a dogged commitment to preserve the story along with their right to view it (methinks they protest too much); however , they admitted a bit grudgingly that something averse to human dignity and the *Imago Dei* (image of God) is built into the storyline. Eventually, we established together that kids killing kids is absolutely evil.

A too–young audience:

Understandably, the young worldview–trained movie critics quickly went back to their arguments for its permissibility as literature for appropriately mature youth. Which brings up another point: when I took my own 16–year–old kids to see *HG*, taking quite seriously the admonition that "parental guidance" may be needed, I was struck deeply by the average age of viewers. It's a teen film and book series, but most of the kids–who made up a good chunk of the audience–were either pre–teen or younger. This may well be indicative of nationwide audiences. The senior class agreed here too: that kind of negligence is the parents' fault. They seemed bothered by that, wondering how such young kids could even process the "violent thematic material and disturbing images" that assigned it a PG–13 rating. Indeed, Probe Ministries' research through The Barna Group shows that, though born–again parents still hold by far the biggest sway on their child's views, most (at least those surveyed up to 40 years old) don't do

well either possessing or passing on a cohesive *biblical* worldview of their own. And that doesn't even speak of unbelieving parents who might show up for some engaging entertainment unaware of the (further) desensitization, dehumanization and modeling this film risks.

Violent mimicry:

A recent, very poignant, *Twitter* post (tweet) belies the notion that such violence doesn't really have an effect on young movie–goers. It said something like: "Overhearing two 12–year–olds arguing about how they'd have killed Foxface [a *HG* character] better." The relationship of real–life violence correlated with viewing violence among children is well–documented, but is easily dismissed in the case of "my kids." When a Christian school classmate of my daughter said she wished that the violence in *Hunger Games* had been less muted by camera jiggles and off–screen implications, the connection to her love of horror films wasn't lost on us. The question we need to help young people constantly ask is, "Am I willing to be so in tune with the Lord and His desire for my holiness that I am willing to give up my popular media and entertainment at any given time?" If killing people is cool, something is wrong.

Are we jaded, voyeuristic hypocrites?

One of *Hunger Games* author Suzanne Collins' stated intentions in writing the books was reportedly to forcefully critique so–called reality TV. She derides "the voyeuristic thrill–watching people being humiliated, or brought to tears, or suffering physically–which I find very disturbing. There's also the potential for desensitizing the audience, so that when they see real tragedy playing out on, say, the news, it doesn't have the impact it should.{1} As I left the theater, I wondered, "Are we just one abstraction away from the curious and jaded crowds who drank in the macabre theater of the hunger games spectacle? After all, we're watching them

watching the killings for sport. No, I didn't watch in order to cheer on the "careers," the professionally trained assassins who hunted fellow teens in a pack. Nor do I condone any such thing. But I did buy a ticket for a movie, knowing the objectionable device by which Collins made her point. A *World* magazine review by Emily Whitten says it well: "…For all the beauty and moral high ground this story contains, it's just as true that the world Collins has created is terribly evil… For some viewers at least—especially younger or more impressionable teens—*The Hunger Games* may produce the same deadening effect on the conscience that Collins seeks to warn us against."{2}

"Am I my brother's keeper?" Yes:

Then there's what I call "the stumble factor." When a moral decision is under consideration——like whether to watch *The Hunger Games* or pass on it (or, perhaps to watch it privately)——we need to take into account the law of liberty that the Apostle Paul set forth in I Corinthians 8: 4-13. The essence of this ethic for the Christian believer is to consider the relative strength of an onlooker's faith when engaging in something you feel free before God to do and, to default to that course of action which avoids making the weaker brother or sister violate their conscience. This is the well-known passage in which Paul deals with the disputable matter of meat offered to idols in a day of rampant paganism. To some weaker-minded Christian believers, imbibing such remnants of idolatry was unthinkable. However, to those who knew that idols are powerless and that all things are sanctified if one's conscience is not being violated, eating temple-sold meat was perfectly fine.

The bottom line of the above and a similar passage, Romans 14: 13-23, seems to be: live according to your own convictions without putting them legalistically onto others, but defer to others' convictions if you sense they have a weakness of conscience or simply a different conviction on a matter not

explicitly dealt with by Scripture. As Titus 1:15 states, "To the pure, all things [like the meat from pagan worship rituals] are pure; but to those who are defiled and unbelieving, nothing is pure, but both their mind and their conscience are defiled." We need to care about those who don't yet believe, those believers who aren't free to act as we do or aren't for some reason able to expose themselves to things related to evil in any way without being compromised by it. Deference is godliness in this case.

A Brief Case for Engagement

The conversation with the Christian school seniors was instructive for everyone, including me. My original misgivings about *The Hunger Games*, written in an email to their administration, had been passed on to them. That memo referenced points of agreement with a very negative film review at an ultra–conservative Web site.{3} So, I knew going into the class discussion that I represented to at least some the legalistic, nay–saying, conservative older guy from that worldview ministry. The instructor had cleverly challenged the class with an extra credit assignment to write about the film and many students had passionately jumped at the opportunity. Now, these thinking kids were ready to stretch their rhetorical wings–or watch their classmates argue, at least.

Engagement does just that–it engages:

First, I polled the class. How many have seen *Hunger Games*?" All but four of the students' hands shot up. "How many haven't had a chance to, but intend to watch it?" Three of the remaining four hands went up. "How many of you stayed up late to catch the midnight premier?" A majority. "Did you enjoy it?" Lots of heads bobbing up and down."Okay, it seems we have a consensus. Next, I put a little syllogism on the board. It went something like this:

Premise #1: Romans 12:9b says, "…Abhor what is evil, cling to

> *what is good." (Phil. 4:8, Psalm 101:3, 2 Cor. 8:21, etc.).*
> *Premise #2: We've established that a central theme of The Hunger Games is evil (kids killing kids).*
> *Conclusion: Therefore, it is wrong or very unwise for a believer to attend the film or read the books.*

As you might expect, the reaction was immediate and, though subdued, passionate. "That misses the point!" "Not necessarily!" So we broke down the argument and concluded that the main point of contention was premise #2: that violence against children is absolutely wrong to do. The issue here, they insisted, was the *portrayal* of violence, not the doing or condoning of it. Sharp young minds caught this crucial distinction, best illustrated by the fact that….

…Even God does it:

As a device, we agreed that violence and even worse elements are sometimes used by God Himself in Scripture. I mean, one would have to slice out entire passages like the story of Lot's daughters or the mass murders of Abimalech to avoid representation of rank evil in order to decry that evil. Thus, it's not necessarily morally wrong to depict even heinous evil for a moral purpose. Let your conscience be your guide (but be sure to develop a biblically tutored conscience): The students and I discussed similar themes in great literature from time immemorial. The ethic of a greater good coming from portrayals of evil in order to call it evil and contrast it with what is good came up. Together, we landed on a more nuanced, workable position. That's when I let my hair down about being a little subversive in my approach. Pointing to the internally logical but flawed argument on the board, I said, "Guys, this is what's wrong with so much in the Church today (and, I may add, why so many walk away from it)——*if* it's foisted on us without recognition of its subjectivity in application (remember the law of liberty of conscience in Romans 14?) and the need to reach our own conclusions outside

of legalism's tyranny." The room relaxed palpably.

Wrestling with the implications is necessary:

This is huge! Youth and emerging adults in churches and Christian schools and the homes of believing parents report a near–universal feeling of never measuring up, and of an us–vs–them, separatist ethos among older Christians regarding culture. As a colleague said dolefully, "Heaven forbid that we would actually teach them to navigate the culture through using a biblical worldview!" But parents and spiritual shepherds can't pass on what they don't have. Given the stress caused by social detachment and holing–up against the culture with its attendant fear–based Christian lifestyle so prevalent today, no wonder youths feel rebellious–such disengaged cloistering *should* be rebelled against. As their teachers do daily, I was attempting to model a reasoned, biblically centered discussion of disputable matters of conscience while calling mature students to a higher ethic focused on holiness, eternal perspective and loving one another––unmarred by life–robbing, one–conviction–fits–all legalism. If we cannot see the difference between primary theological doctrines and disputable social and cultural outworkings like which movie to watch, the fault lies within.

Seeking redeeming elements in secular art:

I believe all art, including film and literature like *The Hunger Games*, that resonates so resoundingly with its audience does so primarily by tapping into something redemptive–after all, the audience members are human, made in God's image, and thus long for the way the world was meant to be. This deep–seated connection to the hearts of people with the redemptive themes of books and movies and other forms of art is short–circuited by whitewashed, disingenuous portrayals of reality often found in "Christian" art. One Christian blogger reviewing *The Hunger Games* stated unequivocally that it "does a better job of depicting Biblical truth than much that passes

for ‘Christian’ literature or film. It is not a shiny, neat, tidy story. It is full of violence, treachery, pride, oppression, greed, indifference, tyranny, and the misuse of power. It kind of looks like parts of the Bible that way.” *The Hunger Games* avoids the unrealistic, passionless, half–hour TV show resolutions nearly universal in popular level Christian fare. “Basically, it [*HG*] is a picture of a world without any good news, without any gospel. It is exactly the world that we would be living in, and that some do live in, if Jesus had not come.”{4} Contrasting the realistic depiction of a fallen world and mankind with the gospel of hope, creative works like *The Hunger Games* can be used constructively.

I offered the class several redemptive elements I saw in the film’s heroine Katniss Everdeen (again, I’ve not read the books). The most glaring depiction is as a Christ–figure, when she offers herself up in place of her young sister, who was randomly chosen as the district’s tribute, presumably a death sentence for her. In fact, Katniss’s character bears an uncanny resemblance to the ideals Romans 12:14–21, at least in a one–dimensional way (warning, this section contains movie spoilers):

> *“Bless those who persecute you. Bless and do not curse them.” Katniss’s reaction to the game, the professional “tributes” and to the arbitrariness of “fate” foisted on her by the show’s producers didn’t include literal blessing, but her dignity and restraint were apparent.*
>
> *“Rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.” Katniss seemed to be a beacon of heartfelt servanthood in the raising of her sister and caretaking of her mother, excruciating as it was. In a very moving scene, Katniss sings a lullaby as Rue, her adopted little sister of sorts, dies in her arms from a game–inflicted injury. Katniss wept bitterly for her loss, a humanizing scene in an otherwise nihilistic story. She nursed a girlhood acquaintance and fellow tribute back to health from serious injury. Katniss entered into the*

lives of others in a vital way.

“Do not be haughty but associate with the lowly. Never be conceited.”– Katniss displays a disarming unselfconscious manner. She was told she was good with a bow and arrow by her love interest back home and those on her team during the games–but she didn’t come off as cocky. She originated from the poor coal–mining district but that didn’t seem to denigrate her as a person in her own mind. She only wondered at the excesses and snootiness of the Capital residents rather than resent them, and she chose to buddy up to the weakest of the contestants.

“If possible, so far as it depends on you, live peaceably with all.” All the other tributes came up out of their elevator tubes onto the playing field swinging swords and throwing knives. Katniss ran away perhaps for survival’s sake, but she did seem to act in defiance of the Darwinian kill–or–be–killed ethic. In this, too, she was only one of a few.

“…Never avenge yourselves…on the contrary, if your enemy is hungry, feed him….” Katniss didn’t set herself up to avenge her persecutors but rather to get in their way by blowing up the food and equipment; she didn’t fire on them from a superior position high in the trees. Rue, a cute little girl who helped turn deadly wasps into weapons against ambushing careers was technically her enemy–one who might’ve been luring her in for the kill. In the spirit of the hunger games, Katniss would have been wise to execute her just in case. But she ended up feeding her and making an alliance that went beyond the pragmatic.

“Do not be overcome with evil, but overcome evil with good.” What did the dignified treatment of Rue’s remains say about Katniss’s character? The film’s moral climax was embodied in a hand sign of respect toward the cameras following the death of Rue. This universally understood ode to the dignity of the

> *dead caused a brief but unsuccessful rebellion among viewers. Katniss had risen above the crass cheapness assigned to human lives, overcoming evil with truth and goodness. What does that say about human nature?*
>
> *Again, redemptive themes like this work because we all share deep knowledge of the incalculable value of a human life. What a wonderful jumping–off place for witnessing of the One who assigns and eternally redeems that value.*

The Hunger Games is a force of popular culture that raises critical questions in a risky way. I firmly believe that it's not a simple issue of right or wrong whether to view or read this powerful story. Believers need to decide discerningly, in good conscience and with a view toward their decision's affect on their own mind and hearts as well as others whether to pursue it for entertainment or cultural engagement.

Endnotes

1. "Conscience Killer?" *World*, April 7, 2012, Emily Whitten. http://www.worldmag.com/articles/19312.
2. Ibid.
3. "How Hungry is America for The Hunger Games," David Outten with Tom Snyder, posted March 22, 2012, MovieGuide.com. http://bit.ly/I6ey52.
4. How "The Hunger Games" Reflects Biblical Truth, posted March 31, 2012, www.DownshoreDrift.com. http://bit.ly/I1Y0xl.

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See Also:

Redeeming *The Hunger Games*

Martial Arts and Just War Theory

Dr. Lawrence Terlizzese examines a Christian view of martial arts in view of the Just War Tradition.

When I was first asked to speak about Christianity and the Martial Arts I was a little skeptical that a Christian can practice Martial Arts in good conscience. The popular objections immediately came to mind: "Aren't the Martial Arts steeped in Zen Buddhist practice?" And, "Should a Christian really participate in something as violent as karate?" Christians commonly object to Martial Arts for such reasons, even vilifying them as something as bad as witchcraft.

Upon reflection, I realized that the practice of Martial Arts naturally corresponds to something I have thought long and hard about: Just War Tradition. A central principal of both Just War thinking and the Martial Arts is personal self–defense. Just War doctrine states that if a Christian is unjustly attacked or sees an innocent third party under attack and has the ability to either prevent the abuse or intervene, that he or she should do so. What's more, to fail to render such aid makes one equally culpable in the crime. In other words, inaction and apathy in the face of injustice is just as wrong as the injustice itself.

Just War thinking is usually applied to the relationships between governments and states in times of war. It helps Christians and societies decide if a war is morally acceptable or not and whether it is worthy of their participation. But there is no logical reason to prevent Christians from applying this principle at a personal level. After all, the police cannot possibly be available always and everywhere; we are

sometimes forced to protect ourselves.

The Violence Objection

As Americans we naturally think that self–defense means owning a handgun. We live in a gun culture that accepts firearms as a God–given right protected by Law. Christians generally have no objections to gun ownership even though the potential for disaster is obvious. But when it comes to a safer alternative to guns, such as the Martial Arts, practitioners are met with a flurry of protests as if they are embracing some foreign religion. Now, to clear the air, I am entirely in favor of the Second Amendment right to bear arms. I am simply suggesting that those individuals who choose to practice the Martial Arts as a means of self–defense have chosen a safer alternative to gun ownership. (I assume that the discipline replaces gun ownership for them. From observation, gun owners and Martial Arts participants are generally not the same people.)

Guns are so easy to use that the potential for abuse and misuse is frightening and lethal. The Martial Arts, however, requires training, discipline and values related to peace and human dignity. One is taught self–control and respect for life that must accompany any notion of self–defense. Students are taught not to kill but rather to apply only the force necessary for a given situation.

One of the ironies of war states that the defender may become more powerful than the aggressor. This principle was clearly demonstrated in World War II when the Allies routed the Axis powers. At this point, if the defending party does not possess a system of values that imposes limited action out of respect for human life, then the defender becomes the aggressor by virtue of his advantage of power. Only a notion of justice tempered with mercy will prevent the just party from slipping into injustice and excessive aggression.

At the personal level, it is very difficult to achieve limited

action that seeks to apply only the necessary force when it comes to using firearms. For example, various schools of Martial Arts often teach restraint in kicking or punching, using only enough force to defend oneself. Bullets cannot be recalled and their results are almost always fatal or horribly injurious. On the other hand, Martial Arts techniques like karate are inherently limited in their effects—despite violence—filled popular Kung Fu movies. They are designed to apply only the force necessary to achieve the goal of self—defense without killing or permanently disabling the opponent. Kicks, chops and blocks will always prove less fatal or damaging than shooting someone at point blank range. The use of force is never ideal or welcome, but if given the choice between karate or a .357 magnum for self—defense, the former clearly comes closer to Christian notions of justice and mercy than the latter.

The Eastern Mysticism Objection

The second objection, that the Martial Arts are *necessarily* tied to Eastern mysticism and thus that any Christian practicing these Arts is betraying Christianity, is much easier to answer. The common misconception is that Bodhidharma, the founder of Zen, brought the Martial Arts from India to China in the Sixth Century AD with the spread of Zen Buddhism. Later, the practice spread to Japan. It is certainly true that the East has created a synthesis between the Martial Arts and mystical philosophy, but this creation represents a fairly modern innovation, especially in Japan with the rise of the Samurai warrior around 1300 AD. This is the most prominent symbol of the Martial Arts in the American mind. These Arts were practiced for millennia before the arrival of Zen in China or Japan and go as far back as 2000 BC in Mesopotamia. Historically speaking, there is no necessary connection between Zen and the Martial Arts.

Philosophically speaking, there is no necessary connection

between Zen and the Martial Arts, either. Zen philosophy teaches a way of meditation or a means of achieving enlightenment focused on the practical and tangible world as opposed to the spoken or written word. That is, it doesn't rely on sacred texts or traditional reason, but rather on intuitive experience. Zen adherents prefer practice and encounter with reality rather than simply talking about it. Since the Martial Arts are also very practical and physical, this makes Zen attractive to many Martial Artists, but this represents an incidental connection, not a logically necessary one. The connection between the two practices is a convenience. One no more has to be a Buddhist to practice the Martial Arts than one has to be a Christian to be an American. Simply put, just because Zen appeals to many Martial Artists doesn't mean the two go together essentially. One can do just fine without the other, and that's where Christians can reconcile doing Martial Arts with their faith.

However, the notion of Chi ["chee"], or life–force, in the Martial Arts presents a serious obstacle to many Christians. This underlying idea states that one must align his or her Chi in order to be an effective practitioner. Since Chi clearly represents a pantheist philosophy, a suitable Christian–theist substitute should replace it. Chi is really nothing more than right attitude, enthusiasm and concentration; it signifies the power of the focused mind rather than a mystical supernatural energy we can draw from. As in all sports and disciplines of any kind, one must focus the mind. This is no different for the Martial Artist than for the marksman who must aim at a target or a ball player who must kick or hit a ball. The body follows the mind.

As Christians legitimately concerned with the compromise of faith with Eastern mysticism or a violent culture, a conceptual union of Just War thinking and the Martial Arts creates an excellent theological and practical tool to reconcile both currents in American society. So, if after

considering this perspective your conscience is clear, enjoy the Martial Arts for the sport, discipline and art form that they can be.

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"I Am Offended by Your Biased Article About Islam"

I have just read your article titled "Islam and the Sword." What is very obvious is that there is A LOT of bias and misinformation in your article about Islam, Prophet Mohammad (peace be upon him), etc. It is very offending and I want you to neutralize your article completely. Objectivity is important if you want to be considered a credible writer and it is clear you are not at all.

You wrote, "Although considered only human, one Muslim writer describes Muhammad as "[T]he best model for man in piety and perfection. He is a living proof of what man can be and of what he can accomplish in the realm of excellence and virtue. . . ."{4} So it is important to note that Muhammad believed that violence is a natural part of Islam." Where is the logic in this??? Especially in the last sentence. How did you move from saying that Prophet Mohammad, the best of all human beings, embodies perfection and virtue and then say he believed violence was an integral part of Islam? Where are your references? The verses that you took out of context? Any decent person is aware that no religion condones violence or bloodshed and I am telling you Islam is not an exception.

The Badr incident did not occur the way you wrongfully relate it. What you say about jihad and the Holy Prophet's life is

ridiculous and immature. I should not and will not justify that Islam is a peaceful religion and loves the other monotheistic religions (Christianity, Islam). Rather, I am asking you to thoroughly research your ideas before publishing them on the web site, which needs to be cleaned from bias and misinformation.

Thank you for taking the time to express your views regarding my essay on Islam and the sword. I am sorry that you believe my information to be in error. I would be interested in your description of the Badr incident. The Oxford History of Islam describes it as one of a number of raids launched against Meccan caravans in order to seize booty and hostages. I would assume that this was accomplished violently rather than peacefully. I am under the impression that Muhammad's depiction as a warrior and political leader is not very controversial.

My point regarding the life of Muhammad and the model he represents is simple. If Muhammad is to be considered the ultimate model within Islam for human behavior, and if he used violence as a tool to further Islam, then violence is a natural part of Islam.

The idea that no religion condones violence is just not the case. The Norse gods of Germania and Scandinavia worshipped Odin, the god of war. Human sacrifice was a central feature of the Aztec religion in Central America. Religion has been used to condone warfare and violence.

I doubt that anyone writes on history or religion without a bias. But, I do feel that accuracy is important.

Sincerely,

Don Closson

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“What About All the Violence and Conquering in the Name of the Christian God?”

Just read your answer to email on the Pope’s inflammatory remarks about Islam, and I had a question about this statement:

> *“Muslims certainly cannot deny that Mohammed admonished Muslims to pick up their swords for Allahs cause (see my essay Islam and the Sword at Probe.org). They also cannot ignore the fact that Islam conquered both the Persian and Byzantine Empires via warfare.”*

While both statements are or may in fact be true, one we Christians cannot deny that as much violence and conquering has been done in the name of God. One should be careful about removing the speck from a brother’s eye before taking the log out of his own. Actually, I believe Christian war preceded Islamic war.

I am not discounting the evil done in the name of Christ, and of course there were Christians fighting before there were Muslims since Christianity preceded Islam by six centuries. My point is about their very nature as belief systems. When one compares the actions of Christ with the actions of Mohammed, the lives of the apostles with the lives of Mohammeds companions, and the teaching found in the New Testament with what is taught in the Quran, one finds a distinct difference in the role that violence plays. Even when we compare the early history of the two religions we find that Christianity went through a three hundred year period of persecution while

Islam conquered a region stretching from Spain to India, experienced three civil wars, and had three of its first four caliphs assassinated by other Muslims.

There is also the distinction to be made between individuals committing violence and vengeful acts, and the responsibility of governments or kings to uphold justice and protect their people from harm. There has been a 1,400 year conflict going on between the civilization that has constituted Europe after the Roman Empire fell and the Islamic world. For most of that time Europe was on the defensive side of things. Not until the late 17th century did the Islamic threat diminish after their failure to take Vienna and the Ottoman Empire was forced to sign the treaty of Karlowitz in 1699.

One also has to remember that Islam is both a religion and a political system; it does not recognize a separation between church and state. When a western nation acts against a Muslim one it is not Christianity vs. Islam, it is a political entity, democratic or otherwise, deciding to act against a religious/political entity.

All of this to say that while we can point to atrocities done in the name of Christ, they have no support in the New Testament. However, atrocities done in the name of Islam have explicit models in the life of Mohammed and can find justification and support in the Quran.

None of this discussion discounts our obligation as ambassadors for Christ to love and reach out to individual Muslims in humility and with compassion.

Thank you for your thoughtful comments.

Don Closson

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Sex and Violence on Television – A Christian Worldview Perspective

Kerby Anderson takes a reasoned look at the amount of sex and violence portrayed on television and comes away with a sobering understanding of the intensity of the problem. From a biblical perspective, this level of consumption of disturbing images will result in a deadening of even Christian hearts to the clear call of Scripture to a life of purity in mind and action.

The Extent of the Problem

Is there too much sex and violence on television? Most Americans seem to think so. One survey found that seventy-five percent of Americans felt that television had "too much sexually explicit material." Moreover, eighty-six percent believed that television had contributed to "a decline in values."{1} And no wonder. Channel surfing through the television reveals plots celebrating premarital sex, adultery, and even homosexuality. Sexual promiscuity in the media appears to be at an all-time high. A study of adolescents (ages twelve to seventeen) showed that watching sex on TV influences teens to have sex. Youths were more likely to initiate intercourse as well as other sexual activities.{2}

A study by the Parents Television Council found that prime time network television is more violent than ever before. In addition, they found that this increasing violence is also of a sexual nature. They found that portrayals of violence are up seventy-five percent since 1998.{3}

The study also provided expert commentary by Deborah Fisher, Ph.D. She states that children, on average, will be exposed to a thousand murders, rapes, and assaults per year through television. She goes on to warn that early exposure to television violence has "consistently emerged as a significant predictor of later aggression."{4}

A previous study by the Parents Television Council compared the changes in sex, language, and violence between decades. The special report entitled *What a Difference a Decade Makes* found many shocking things.{5}

First, on a per-hour basis, sexual material more than tripled in the last decade. For example, while references to homosexuality were once rare, now they are mainstream. Second, the study found that foul language increased five-fold in just a decade. They also found that the intensity of violent incidents significantly increased.

These studies provide the best quantifiable measure of what has been taking place on television. No longer can defenders of television say that TV is "not that bad." The evidence is in, and television is more offensive than ever.

Christians should not be surprised by these findings. Sex and violence have always been part of the human condition because of our sin nature (Romans 3:23), but modern families are exposed to a level of sex and violence that is unprecedented. Obviously, this will have a detrimental effect. The Bible teaches that "as a man thinks in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7, KJV). What we see and hear affects our actions. And while this is true for adults, it is especially true for children.

Television's Impact on Behavior

What is the impact of watching television on subsequent behavior? There are abundant studies which document that what

you see, hear, and read does affect your perception of the world and your behavior.

The American Academy of Pediatrics in 2000 issued a "Joint Statement on the Impact of Entertainment Violence on Children." They cited over one thousand studies, including reports from the Surgeon General's office and the National Institute of Mental Health. They say that these studies "point overwhelmingly to a causal connection between media violence and aggressive behavior in some children."{6}

In 1992, the American Psychological Association concluded that forty years of research on the link between TV violence and real-life violence has been ignored, stating that "the 'scientific debate is over' and calling for federal policy to protect society."{7}

A 1995 poll of children ten to sixteen years of age showed that children recognize that "what they see on television encourages them to take part in sexual activity too soon, to show disrespect for their parents, [and] to lie and to engage in aggressive behavior." More than two-thirds said they are influenced by television; seventy-seven percent said TV shows too much sex before marriage, and sixty-two percent said sex on television and in movies influences their peers to have sexual relations when they are too young. Two-thirds also cited certain programs featuring dysfunctional families as encouraging disrespect toward parents.

The report reminds us that television sets the baseline standard for the entire entertainment industry. Most homes (ninety-eight percent) have a television set. And according to recent statistics, that TV in the average household is on more than eight hours each day.{8}

By contrast, other forms of entertainment (such as movies, DVDs, CDs) must be sought out and purchased. Television is universally available, and thus has the most profound effect

on our culture.

As Christians we need to be aware of the impact television has on us and our families. The studies show us that sex and violence on TV can affect us in subtle yet profound ways. We can no longer ignore the growing body of data that suggests that televised imagery does affect our perceptions and behaviors. So we should be concerned about the impact television (as well as other forms of media) has on our neighbors and our society as a whole.

Sex on Television

Most Americans believe there is too much sex on television. A survey conducted in 1994 found that seventy-five percent of Americans felt that television had "too much sexually explicit material." Moreover, eighty-six percent believed that television had contributed to "a decline in values."{9} As we documented earlier, sexual promiscuity on television is at an all-time high.

I have previously written about the subject of pornography and talked about the dangerous effects of sex, especially when linked with violence.{10} Neil Malamuth and Edward Donnerstein document the volatile impact of sex and violence in the media. They say, "There can be relatively long-term, anti-social effects of movies that portray sexual violence as having positive consequences."{11}

In a message given by Donnerstein, he concluded with this warning and observation: "If you take normal males and expose them to graphic violence against women in R-rated films, the research doesn't show that they'll commit acts of violence against women. It doesn't say they will go out and commit rape. But it does demonstrate that they become less sensitized to violence against women, they have less sympathy for rape victims, and their perceptions and attitudes and values about

violence change."{12}

It is important to remember that these studies are applicable not just to hard-core pornography. Many of the studies used films that are readily shown on television (especially cable television) any night of the week. And many of the movies shown today in theaters are much more explicit than those shown just a few years ago.

Social commentator Irving Kristol asked this question in a *Wall Street Journal* column: "Can anyone really believe that soft porn in our Hollywood movies, hard porn in our cable movies and violent porn in our 'rap' music is without effect? Here the average, overall impact is quite discernible to the naked eye. And at the margin, the effects, in terms most notably of illegitimacy and rape, are shockingly visible."{13}

Christians must be careful that sexual images on television don't conform us to the world (Rom. 12:2). Instead we should use discernment. Philippians 4:8 says, "Finally, brothers, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things."

Sex on television is at an all-time high, so we should be even more careful to screen what we and our families see. Christians should be concerned about the images we see on television.

Violence on Television

Children's greatest exposure to violence comes from television. TV shows, movies edited for television, and video games expose young children to a level of violence unimaginable just a few years ago. The American Psychological Association says the average child watches eight thousand televised murders and one hundred thousand acts of violence

before finishing elementary school.{14} That number more than doubles by the time he or she reaches age eighteen.

At a very young age, children are seeing a level of violence and mayhem that in the past may have been seen only by a few police officers and military personnel. TV brings hitting, kicking, stabbings, shootings, and dismemberment right into homes on a daily basis.

The impact on behavior is predictable. Two prominent Surgeon General reports in the last two decades link violence on television and aggressive behavior in children and teenagers. In addition, the National Institute of Mental Health issued a ninety-four page report, *Television and Behavior: Ten Years of Scientific Progress and Implications for the Eighties.* They found "overwhelming" scientific evidence that "excessive" violence on television spills over into the playground and the streets.{15} In one five-year study of 732 children, "several kinds of aggression, conflicts with parents, fighting and delinquency, were all positively correlated with the total amount of television viewing."{16}

Long-term studies are even more disturbing. University of Illinois psychologist Leonard Eron studied children at age eight and then again at eighteen. He found that television habits established at the age of eight influenced aggressive behavior throughout childhood and adolescent years. The more violent the programs preferred by boys in the third grade, the more aggressive their behavior, both at that time and ten years later. He therefore concluded that "the effect of television violence on aggression is cumulative."{17}

Twenty years later Eron and Rowell Huesmann found the pattern continued. He and his researchers found that children who watched significant amounts of TV violence at the age of eight were consistently more likely to commit violent crimes or engage in child or spouse abuse at thirty.{18} They concluded that "heavy exposure to televised violence is one of the

causes of aggressive behavior, crime and violence in society. Television violence affects youngsters of all ages, of both genders, at all socioeconomic levels and all levels of intelligence."{19}

Violent images on television affect children in adverse ways and Christians should be concerned about the impact.

Biblical Perspective

Television is such a part of our lives that we often are unaware of its subtle and insidious influence. Nearly every home has a television set, so we tend to take it for granted and are often oblivious to its influence.

I've had many people tell me that they watch television, and that it has no impact at all on their worldview or behavior. However the Bible teaches that "as a man thinks in his heart, so is he" (Proverbs 23:7). What we view and what we think about affects our actions. And there is abundant psychological evidence that television viewing affects our worldview.

George Gerbner and Larry Gross, working at the Annenberg School of Communications in the 1970s, found that heavy television viewers live in a scary world. "We have found that people who watch a lot of TV see the real world as more dangerous and frightening than those who watch very little. Heavy viewers are less trustful of their fellow citizens, and more fearful of the real world."{20} Heavy viewers also tended to overestimate their likelihood of being involved in a violent crime. They defined heavy viewers as those adults who watch an average of four or more hours of television a day. Approximately one-third of all American adults fit that category.

And if this is true of adults, imagine how television violence affects children's perceptions of the world. Gerbner and Gross say, "Imagine spending six hours a day at the local movie

house when you were twelve years old. No parent would have permitted it. Yet, in our sample of children, nearly half of the twelve-year-olds watch an average of six or more hours of television per day." This would mean that a large portion of young people fit into the category of heavy viewers. Their view of the world must be profoundly shaped by TV. Gerbner and Gross therefore conclude, "If adults can be so accepting of the reality of television, imagine its effect on children. By the time the average American child reaches public school, he has already spent several years in an electronic nursery school."{21}

Television viewing affects both adults and children in subtle ways. We must not ignore the growing body of data that suggests that televised imagery does affect our perceptions and behaviors. Our worldview and our subsequent actions are affected by what we see on television. Christians, therefore, must be careful not to let television conform us to the world (Romans 12:2), but instead should develop a Christian worldview.

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Violence in the Schoolyard: Why?

America is becoming an increasingly dangerous place to live. Random violence. Drive-by shootings. Colombine. A twelve-year old boy kills his schoolmate with a pistol he has brought to school. Why? “Well, he ticked me off!” was the reply.

No remorse. . . No conscience.

Do you know what a “feral” hog is? We have some here in Texas – domesticated pigs which have escaped into the brushy Hill Country and live there as wild as their smaller, wild cousins, the Javelinas.

There have been feral children, too. Perhaps the most famous was a teenage boy spotted one day naked and loping up a hill on all fours in Aveyron, France. He was captured on July 25, 1799 and extensive attempts were made to “rehabilitate” and “domesticate” him. These ended largely in failure, including Herculean efforts to teach him to speak (he was mute when first found).

Anyone who has ever observed children suddenly transplanted into another culture are amazed at the way they take to the local language like “ducks to water!” Why? Because children from age one to seven or eight have an enormous capacity to learn – to absorb sights and sounds and smells and everything!

Children have a conscience, too. It is not yet fully formed by way of specifics, but like the capacity to learn language, they possess the ideas of right and wrong. As they grow, through experience, parental guidance and discipline, school, church, etc., they come to embrace moral concepts as easily and automatically as they do linguistic ones.

Today we tend to be “politically correct” and to not push our

personal, moral, and religious agendas off on others. We are hesitant to speak of right and wrong in public for fear of offending.

You see, it is assumed that we already know what is right and what is wrong. It is assumed that you know that. And that the children know. . .

But they don't know. Their conscience must be educated, and this is the problem. Children are growing up in America as crippled morally as that wild boy in Averyon was, linguistically and socially. We have raised an entire generation of "morally feral" children!

I have a good friend of thirty-five years who sold his business and began to use his time in ministering to students at the large, state university in his city. He began to meet with students daily in the student center on campus. Jay was seminary trained and is one of the most effective personal workers I have ever known.

He told me recently that he asks the same question of almost every student: "If you knew God does exist, and it were possible for you to have a personal interview or conversation with Him, what would you ask Him?"

Jay said that SIXTY PERCENT of those have replied with something like, "Gee. . . Gosh! I've never thought about that. . . I don't know what I'd ask Him. . . I guess nothing!"

What they have lots to say about, however, is that no one should be excluded, and everyone's opinion is true because it is "true to them." This is practicing "tolerance." And anyone who doesn't hold this view is a bigot. They think it a crime of the highest order to exclude anyone on the basis of personal belief or lifestyle.

Actually, tolerance is a Christian virtue and should be practiced. But what does it really mean? It doesn't mean that

all lifestyles must be accepted. That is not tolerance, but rather, surrender – tacit acceptance of all behavior with no regard to standards of any kind.

What kind of "tolerance" did Jesus practice? We are told that He was *full* of grace and truth. And these two were always in perfect balance. We, however, tend toward the extremes of these – so full of grace that we compromise the Gospel, or so full of truth that no one can stand us!

Over and over again, we see Jesus "nudging" people toward truth: Nicodemus. The rich young ruler. The parables. The woman at the well. Pilate. Will Rogers is probably known best for his famous quote: "I never met a man I didn't like." It could be said of Jesus that He never met a person He didn't love. He loved and accepted every person He met, including those whose behavior He could not condone. That's tolerance. To the woman caught in the act of adultery He said, "Neither do I condemn you (grace); go and sin no more (truth)!"

Jesus pressed. He wanted people to understand truth so much that He was not afraid to offend them if it would help to accomplish that purpose.

And so must we upon occasion. Remember: Even God is not universally admired!

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Islam and the Sword

Don Closson provides a consideration of the role that violence has played in both historical and contemporary Islam.

On September 11, 2001 Americans found themselves confronted by

an enemy they knew little about. We had suddenly lost more lives to a sneak attack than had been lost in the attack on Pearl Harbor and yet few understood the reasons for the hatred that prompted the destruction of the World Trade Center towers and part of the Pentagon. Even in the days that followed, Americans were getting mixed signals from the media and from national politicians. One voice focused on the peaceful nature of Islam, going so far as to argue that Osama bin Laden could not be a faithful Muslim and commit the acts attributed to him. Others warned that bin Laden has a considerable following in the Muslim world and that even if he was removed as a potential threat many would step in to replace him with equal or greater fervor.

Some argued that fundamentalist Muslims are no different than fundamentalist believers of any religion. The problem is not Islam, but religious belief of any type when taken too seriously. This view holds that all forms of religious belief, Christian, Jewish, or Islamic can promote terrorism. Robert Wright, a visiting scholar at the University of Pennsylvania writes that:

> If Osama Bin Laden were a Christian, and he still wanted to destroy the World Trade Center, he would cite Jesus' rampage against the money-changers. If he didn't want to destroy the World Trade Center, he could stress the Sermon on the Mount.{1}

His view is that terrorism can be justified by any religion when people are economically depressed. He adds "there is no timeless, immutable essence of Islam, rooted in the Quran, that condemns it to a medieval morality."{2}

This claim points to the question: Is there something inherent in Islam that makes it more likely to resort to violence than other world religions like Christianity or Buddhism? While it is important to admit that all religions and ideologies have adherents that are willing to use violence to achieve what

they believe are justified ends, it does not follow that all religions and ideologies teach equally the legitimacy of violent means.

People have committed horrible atrocities in the name of Jesus Christ, from the inquisitions to the slaying of abortionists. However, it is my position that it is not possible to justify these actions from the teachings of Christ Himself. Nowhere in the New Testament does Jesus teach that one should kill for the sake of the Gospel, the Kingdom of God, or to defend the honor of Jesus Himself.

What about Islam? My contention is that Islam's founder Muhammad, and the Qur'an, its holy book, condone violence as a legitimate tool for furthering Allah's goals. And that those who use violence in the name of Allah are following a tradition that began with the very birth of Islam.

Muhammad

As mentioned earlier, there are followers in most of the world's belief systems that justify the use of violence to achieve their religious or political goals. However, this says more about the sinfulness of humanity than it does about the belief system itself. It is important to look past the individual behavior of a few followers to the message and actions of the founder of each system and his or her closest disciples. In the case of Islam, this means Muhammad and the leadership of Islam after Muhammad's death.

One cannot overstate the centrality of Muhammad's example within the religion of Islam. One of the greatest Muslim theologians, al- Ghazzali, writes of Muhammad:

> Know that the key to happiness is to follow the sunna [Muhammad's actions] and to imitate the Messenger of God in all his coming and going, his movement and rest, in his way of eating, his attitude, his sleep and his talk . . . God

> has said: “What the messenger has brought—accept it, and what he has prohibited—refrain from it!” (59:7). That means, you have to sit while putting on trousers, and to stand when winding a turban, and to begin with the right foot when putting on shoes.{3}

Although considered only human, one Muslim writer describes Muhammad as “[T]he best model for man in piety and perfection. He is a living proof of what man can be and of what he can accomplish in the realm of excellence and virtue. . . .”{4} So it is important to note that Muhammad believed that violence is a natural part of Islam. Many passages of the Quran, which came from Muhammad’s lips support violence. Followers are told to “fight and slay the Pagans wherever ye find them (9:5),” and to “Fight those who believe not in God, nor the Last Day.” (9:29) Muhammad also promises paradise for those who die in battle for Allah, “Those who left their homes . . . or fought or been slain,—Verily, I will blot out from them their iniquities, and admit them into Gardens with rivers flowing beneath;—A reward from the Presence of God.” (3:195; cf. 2:244; 4:95)

While living in Medina, having escaped from persecution in Mecca, Muhammad supported himself and his group of followers by raiding Meccan caravans. His fame grew after a stunning defeat of a large, well-defended caravan at Badr. Muhammad was also willing to have assassinated those who merely ridiculed his prophetic claims. The list of those killed included Jews, old men and women, slaves, and a mother of five children who was killed while she slept.{5} Also, in order to violate a long-standing ban against warfare during a sacred month, he claimed a new revelation that gave him permission to kill his enemies.{6}

Violent expediency seems to have been the guiding rule of Muhammad’s ethics.

Early Islam

Muhammad's life as a prophet was a precarious one. After fleeing Mecca and establishing himself in Medina, Muhammad was constantly being tested militarily by those who considered him a religious and political threat. Although at an initial disadvantage, Muhammad wore down his opponents by raiding their caravans, seizing valuable property, taking hostages and disrupting the all-important economic trade Mecca enjoyed with the surrounding area.{7} The turning point for Muhammad and his followers seems to have come in what is known as the Battle of the Ditch or the Siege of Medina. A large Meccan force failed to take the city and destroy the new religion. Suspecting that a local Jewish tribe had plotted with the Meccans to destroy him, Muhammad had all the men of the tribe killed and the women and children sold into slavery.{8} In A.D. 630 Muhammad returned to Mecca with a large force and took it with little bloodshed. He rewarded many of its leaders financially for surrendering and within a short period of time a large number of the surrounding tribes came over to this new and powerful religious and political movement.

Muhammad continued building his following by using a combination of material enticements, his religious message, and force when necessary. With the fall of Mecca, many other tribes realized Muhammad's position as the most powerful political leader in western Arabia and sent representatives to negotiate agreements with him.

Muhammad's death in 632, just two years after his triumphant return to Mecca, thrust an important decision on the community of believers. Should they choose one person to lead in Muhammad's place or do they separate into many communities. The decision was made to pick Abu Bakr, the Prophet's father-in-law and early supporter to assume the role of caliph or successor to Muhammad. Immediately, many who had submitted to Muhammad refused to do so to Abu Bakr. Several tribes wanted

political independence, some sought to break religiously as well. The result is known as the Apostasy wars. At the end of two years of fighting to put down both religious and political threats, Abu Bakr had extended his control to include the entire Arabian Peninsula. Islam was now in position to extend its influence beyond Arabia with a large standing army of believers.

Violence and warfare seems to have dominated early Islam. Two of the first four caliphs were assassinated by internal rivals, and within the first fifty years of its existence Islam experienced two bloody civil wars. Rival tribal loyalties within and the religious struggle or jihad against the Byzantine and Sasanian Empires made the first century of Islam a bloody one.

Jihad

Historian Paul Johnson writes,

> [T]he history of Islam has essentially been a history of conquest and re-conquest. The 7th-century "breakout" of Islam from Arabia was followed by the rapid conquest of North Africa, the invasion and virtual conquest of Spain, and a thrust into France that carried the crescent to the gates of Paris.{9}

From the beginning, Muslims "saw their mission as jihad, or militant effort to combat evil and to spread Muhammad's message of monotheism and righteousness far and wide."{10} Although many Muslims in America have argued that jihad primarily refers to a struggle or striving for personal righteousness, Bernard Lewis, professor of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University writes that, "The more common interpretation, and that of the overwhelming majority of the classical jurists and commentators, presents jihad as armed struggle for Islam against infidels and apostates."{11}

Although highly regulated by Islamic law, the call for every able- bodied Muslim to defend Islam began with Muhammad and has continued with the fatwas of Osama bin Laden in 1996 and 1998. Bin Laden argues that his attacks on American civilians and military personnel conform to Islamic law because America is acting as an imperialistic aggressor against Islam. He has three specific complaints: America has placed infidel troops on holy soil in Saudi Arabia; America has caused the death of over a million Iraqi children since Desert Storm; and American support for the evil Zionist nation of Israel.

Regarding the history of jihad in Islam, an ex-chief justice of Saudi Arabia has written "[A]t first 'the fighting' was forbidden, then it was permitted and after that it was made obligatory, . . ." Muslims are to fight against those who oppress Islam and who worship others along with Allah.{12} He adds that even though fighting is disliked by the human soul, Allah has made ready an immense reward beyond imagination for those who obey. He also quotes Islamic tradition, which says, "Paradise has one hundred grades which Allah has reserved for the Mujahidin who fight in His Cause."{13}

Numerous passages in the Qur'an refer to Allah's use of violence. A surah titled "The Spoils of War" states, "O Prophet! Rouse the Believers to the fight. If there are twenty amongst you . . . they will vanquish two hundred: if a hundred, they will vanquish a thousand of the Unbelievers: for these are a people without understanding."{14} Another says, "O ye who believe! When ye meet the Unbelievers in hostile array, never turn your backs to them. . . ."{15} It adds that those who do will find themselves in hell, a significant incentive to fight on.

Muslims and Modernity

Islam was born in the midst of persecution and eventually conquest. Muhammad was adept at both religious and military

leadership, but what about modern Islam? Do all Muslims see jihad in the light of conquest and warfare?

While it is probably safe to say that American born Muslims apply the teachings of Muhammad and Islamic traditions differently than Saudi or Iranian Muslims. The use of violence in the propagation of Islam enjoys wide support. Part of the reason is that the concept of separation of church and state is alien to Islam. Muhammad Iqbal, architect of Pakistan's split from Hindu India, wrote, "The truth is that Islam is not a church. It is a state conceived as a contractual organism. . . ."{16} Responding to the inability of Islam to accommodate the modern world, an Algerian Islamic activist points to the example of Muhammad:

> The Prophet himself did not opt to live far away from the camp of men. He did not say to youth: "Sell what you have and follow me. . . ." At Medina, he was not content merely to be the preacher of the new faith: he became also the leader of the new city, where he organized the religious, social and economic life. . . . Later, carrying arms, he put himself at the head of his troops.{17}

The powerful combination within Islam of immediate paradise for those who die while fighting for Allah and the unity of political, religious, and economic structures, helps us to understand the source of suicide bombers and children who dream of becoming one. Young Palestinians are lining up by the hundreds in the West Bank and Gaza Strip to volunteer for suicide missions. Eyad Sarraj, the director of the Gaza Community Mental Health Project, detects a widespread zeal. "If they are turned down they become depressed. They feel they have been deprived of the ultimate award of dying for God."{18} Palestinian support for suicide bombers is now at 70 to 80 percent.

Islam and Christianity both require its followers to sacrifice and turn from the world and self. Yet while Islam equates

political conquest with the furtherance of Allah's reign, Jesus taught that we render unto Caesar what is Caesar's and unto God what is God's. Christianity recognizes that the advancement of God's kingdom is not necessarily a political one. The New Testament did not advocate the overthrow of the Roman Empire. Muslims are given the example of Muhammad's personal sacrifice in battle so that Allah's enemies might be defeated. Christians are given the example of Christ who gave His life as a sacrifice, so that even His enemies might believe and have eternal life.

Notes

1. Robert Wright, www.msnbc.com/news, 10/30/2001.
2. Ibid.
3. Norman L. Geisler & Abdul Saleeb, *Answering Islam: The Crescent in the Light of the Cross*, (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Book House, 1993), p 82.
4. Ibid., 84.
5. Ibid., 175.
6. The Quran states, "They ask thee Concerning fighting in the Prohibited Month. Say: 'Fighting therein is a grave (offense)'; But graver is it In the sight of God To prevent access to the path of God." (2:217)
7. John Esposito, *The Oxford History of Islam*, (Oxford University Press, 1999), p 10.
8. Geisler & Saleeb, p 79.
9. Paul Johnson, *National Review*, October 15, 2001.
10. John Esposito, *The Oxford History of Islam*, p 13.
11. Bernard Lewis, "Jihad vs. Crusade," *The Wall Street Journal,* September 27, 2001.
12. Sheikh Abdullah Bin Muhammad Bin Humaid, "Jihad in the Qur'an and Sunnah," http://islamworld.net/jihad.html, p 4.
13. Ibid., p 8.
14. Qur'an 8:65.
15. Qur'an 8:15-16.
16. Kenneth Cragg & Marston Speight, *Islam From Within,*

(Wadsworth Inc., 1980), p 213
17. Ibid., p 228.
18. Eric Silver, "Bomber quit intelligence service to join Hamas two days before
attack," *Independent Digital* (UK) Ltd, 03 December 2001, www.independent.co.uk.

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5 Lies the Church Tells Women

[Note: This article is taken from J. Lee Grady's book *Ten Lies the Church Tells Women.* I do not subscribe to everything in this book, particularly the author's belief that there are no restrictions to women in the church. I do not agree that the office of pastor and elder are open to women, though I believe God has given many women, including me, the spiritual gift of pastor-teacher (which some find easier to receive when it's called "shepherd-teacher"). At Probe, we exhort people to be discerning in what we hear and read. Mr. Grady's book is firmly in the egalitarian camp, but as a complementarian who seeks to be discerning, I can recognize the truth of some of what he says without embracing what I believe is unbiblical. Please see the end of this article for other articles on the role of women I have written for our Web site.]

In this article I look at five lies the church tells women, inspired by the book by J. Lee Grady called *Ten Lies the Church Tells Women.*{1} I'm not saying all churches say all these things, but there are certain pockets of Christianity where these lies are circulated.

Lie #1: God Created Women as Inferior Beings, Destined to Serve Their Husbands.

The first lie is that God created women as inferior beings, destined to serve their husbands. Those looking for Scripture to back up their beliefs point to Genesis 2:18, where God makes a "helpmeet" for Adam. "See?" they say. "Helpers are subordinate to the ones they help, which proves women are here to serve men." This ignores the times in the Psalms (10:14, 27:9, 118:7) where God is praised as our helper, and He is certainly not inferior or subordinate to us!

Lee Grady points out, "[I]t is a cultural bias, not a spiritual or scientific principle, that women were 'made' for the kitchen or laundry room. This is the most common form of male chauvinism, a burden placed on women by selfish men who want someone to wash their dishes."{2}

This view that women are inferior to men is not biblical, but it has infected the church from the beginning.

> *The Greek culture into which the early church was born viewed women as "half animal," unworthy of education, to be kept quiet and kept locked away, obedient to their husbands. In Jewish culture it was considered inappropriate for a man to even speak to a woman in public—including his own wife. A woman speaking to a man who was not her husband was considered to be giving evidence that she had committed adultery with him, and could be divorced. You can imagine the scandal Jesus caused when he regularly sought the company of women and talked to them, and taught them, just as he did men. Or when he allowed prostitutes to talk to him or pour perfume on his feet.{3}*

Eve was not created to be Adam's servant, but his honored and respected wife and co-regent, fashioned to rule over creation with him. We see another picture of God's intention for the

first Adam and Eve in our future as the church. The bride of the Second Adam, Christ, is created and is being fashioned to reign with Him forever.{4}

Lee Grady says, "Jesus modeled a revolutionary new paradigm of empowerment by affirming women as co-heirs of God's grace."{5} Paul continued this completely new, respectful view of women by inviting women to share in the ministry of the gospel and the church, and by teaching the equality of husbands and wives in the marriage relationship (although there is a biblical distinction of roles).

When God created woman, He didn't create an inferior being, He created what He delights to call "the glory of man."(1 Cor. 11:7)

Lie #2: A Man Needs to "Cover" a Woman in Her Ministry Activities.

The second lie is that a man needs to "cover" a woman in her ministry activities. "In many cases, leaders have innocently twisted various Bible verses to suggest that a woman's public ministry can be valid only if she is properly 'covered' by a male who is present. Often women are told that they cannot even lead women's Bible studies or prayer meetings unless a pastor, deacon or some other man can provide proper oversight."{6}

One woman was told that she could not start a backyard Bible school class in her neighborhood during the summer unless her husband agreed to be present at each session and teach all the Bible lessons. Her church elders said she could plan each day's crafts and make all the snacks, but a man had to conduct the "spiritual" aspects of the outreach since he is the proper "covering."{7}

It is disturbing to think of the implication of this belief. When we, as women, use our spiritual gifts and respond to

God’s call to minister in various ways (within the biblical restrictions for women) without a man present, is our ministry less legitimate and valid than a man doing the same work? What if a woman with the spiritual gift of evangelism senses the Holy Spirit directing her to speak to the cashier at the gas station, and there’s no man around? On a personal note, when I am speaking at one of Probe’s Mind Games conferences, do my lectures lack legitimacy or truth because the male Probe staff members are busy teaching in other rooms?

Ephesians 5:21 says, “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.” Out of respect for our own weaknesses and limitations, I believe that all of us who wish to minister to others should pursue an attitude of humble submission to the body of Christ. We need to submit our beliefs and methods (and content, if we’re teaching) to trusted believers who can provide support, direction, and, if needed, correction. And anyone engaged in ministry needs prayer support, which some have called a “prayer covering;” although that is not a biblical term.

But there is no verse that says, “If a woman teaches My word, make sure a man is present so she will be covered properly.” Paul’s instruction that older women teach the younger women doesn’t include making sure that someone with a Y chromosome is present! What underlies this erroneous idea that a man’s presence somehow validates any woman’s ministry is, intentional or not, a profound disrespect and distrust of women.

Lie #3: Women Can’t be Fulfilled or Spiritually Effective Without a Husband or Children.

The third lie is that women can’t be fulfilled or spiritually effective without a husband or children. Some churches teach that God’s perfect plan for every woman is to be a wife and

mother. Period. Sometimes Christian women successful in business or some other professional field are made to feel unwelcome at a church, as if they are an unhealthy influence on "purer" women.

In some places, single women are prevented from leading home fellowship groups because they're single.{8} Others have been discouraged from running for political office or pursuing a graduate education because God's plan was for them to marry and keep house—even when God hadn't brought a groom into the picture!

Lee Grady says, "We must stop placing a heavy yoke on unmarried and divorced women in the church by suggesting that they are not complete without a man in their lives or that a husband somehow legitimizes their ministries."{9}

In some churches, women are routinely taught that the best way for them to serve God is to get married, make their husbands happy, and have children. They think this should be the sole focus of women's lives. And to be honest, when God has given a woman a husband and children, especially young children, focusing her primary energies and gifting on her family truly *is* the most important way she serves God in that season of her life. Children will not be impressed with how many Bible studies their mother teaches each week. And most husbands will be less than enthusiastic for their wives to go off on several mission trips each year when it means the home is falling apart and everybody's life is in chaos.

But women, even women with families, are given spiritual gifts that God intends for us to use to build up the body of Christ, both inside and outside our families. When we exercise those spiritual gifts and abilities, God delights to honor us with a sense of fulfillment. And usually that involves ministry in the church or in the world, as long as it's secondary to our family priorities.

But not all women are called to marriage and motherhood. It is disrespectful to single Christian women to treat them as second-class women because they don't wear a wedding ring. It's heartbreaking and frustrating when a woman would love to be married, but God hasn't brought her to the man of His choice; it just adds unnecessary sorrow for the church to say, "Sorry, honey, without a man you don't have a place here."

Lie #4: Women Should Never Work Outside the Home.

The fourth lie is that women should never work outside the home. Women who take jobs are shamed and judged, because they can't please God if they do anything outside of being a wife and mother.

This is a hurtful lie to many women who don't have a choice about working or not. There are huge numbers of divorced and widowed women in the church who would much rather stay at home with their families, but they're the only breadwinners. And for many two-parent families, they honestly can't survive on the husband's paycheck alone.

This lie comes from a misreading of Paul's exhortation in Titus 2:4 for women to be "workers at home."

Paul wasn't calling them to quit their day jobs to stay home. Women in that culture had no education and usually no opportunities for employment. He was addressing a character issue about being faithful and industrious, not lazy and self-centered. This letter was written to the pastor of a church on Crete, a society known for the laziness and self-indulgence of its people.{10}

Before the 1800's and the Industrial Revolution, both men and women worked at home, and they worked hard. Whether farming, fishing, animal husbandry, or whatever trade they engaged in, they did it from home. The care and nurture of children was

woven into the day's work and extended families helped care for each other. There was no such thing, except among the very wealthy, as a woman who didn't work.

This lie completely ignores the Proverbs 31 woman, who not only took excellent care of her family, but also had several home-based businesses that required her to leave her home to engage in these businesses. I personally appreciate this biblical pattern because I had a home-based business and a ministry the entire time my children were growing, both of which took me out of the home sometimes. I was able to grow my gifts as my kids were growing, and now that they're both adults, I am able to use those gifts and abilities more fully with my new freedom to leave home.

On the other hand, an equally distressing expectation common to younger people in today's churches is that women should always work, regardless of whether they have children or not. Our culture has so downgraded the importance of focused parenting that many people consider it wasteful for a woman to be "only" a homemaker. It's sexist to say that a woman's only valid contribution to the world or the church is to be a homemaker, but both extremes are wrong and harmful.

Lie #5: Women Must Obediently Submit to Their Husbands in All Situations.

The last lie says that women must obediently submit to their husbands in *all* situations. This lie really grieves me deeply, because it is probably responsible for more pain and abuse than any other lie we've looked at in this article.

In Ephesians 5:22, wives are commanded to submit to our husbands. For some people, this has been twisted to mean the husband is the boss and the wife's job is to obey his every whim. That is a relationship of power, not self-sacrificing love, as this marriage passage actually teaches. The wife is called to serve her husband through submission, and the

husband is called to serve his wife through sacrificial love.

We have no idea how many women have been physically, emotionally, sexually, and spiritually abused by their husbands wielding the submission verses as a weapon. When they finally tell their pastor about their husband's rage-outs and physical assaults, they are often not believed, and sometimes they are told that if they would learn to submit the violence would stop. Then they are counseled that it would be a sin to separate and hold the husband accountable for what is a crime! Some abused women, who feared for their lives, have actually been told, "Don't worry. Even if you died you would go to be with the Lord. So you win either way. Just keep praying for him. But you are not allowed to leave."{11}

A comprehensive study on domestic violence in the church in the mid 80's revealed that 26 percent of the pastors counseled an abused wife to keep submitting and trust that God would either stop the abuse or give her the strength to endure it. About a fourth of the pastors believed that abuse is the wife's fault because of her lack of submission! And a majority of the pastors said it is better for wives to endure violence against them than to seek a separation that might end in divorce.{12} I respectfully suggest that separation *with the goal of reconciliation* is often the only way to motivate an abusive husband to get help.{13} Just as we cast a broken limb to enable it to heal, separation is like putting a cast on a broken relationship as the first step to enable change and healing. We see in 1 Cor. 5 that God's plan for unrepentant believers is to experience the pain of isolation in separation from friends and loved ones; why would it be unthinkable for the same principle to be effective within an abusive marriage?

All the lies we've looked at in this article are the result of twisting God's word out of a misunderstanding of God's intent for His people. The way to combat the lies is to know the truth—because that's what sets us free.

Notes

1. Lee Grady, *10 Lies the Church Tells Women* (Lake Mary, FL: Creation House, 2000).

2. Grady, 23.

3. George Byron Koch, "Shall a Woman Keep Silent? Part 1." http://www.resurrection.org/shall_a_woman____part_1.htm.

4. Rev. 22:5, 2 Tim. 2:12.

5. Grady, 21.

6. Grady, 89-90.

7. Grady, 90.

8. Grady, 140.

9. Grady, 143.

10. "Even one of their own prophets has said, 'Cretans are always liars, evil brutes, lazy gluttons.'" (Titus 1:2)

11. Grady, 172.

12. Grady, 174.

13. I especially recommend Dr. Paul Hegstrom of Life Skills Learning Centers. He is a recovered abusive husband and pastor who wrote an excellent book, *Angry Men and the Women Who Love Them: Breaking the Cycle of Physical and Emotional Abuse* (Beacon Hill Press, 1999). His Web site is http://www.lifeskillsintl.org.

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Kids Killing Kids

Not so long ago the biggest problem kids faced was getting a flat tire on their bikes or having a mean teacher assign homework over the weekend. How times have changed. Who would have guessed that one of the perennial stories would be kids killing kids?

In this essay we're going to talk about the issue of school shootings and the broader issue of kids killing kids. Why is this happening? What can be done to stem the tide of violence on campus and society? We'll look at such topics as video games, teenage rebellion, and tolerance. And we'll also look at the spiritual aspects as well.

Each time we hear about gunshots on a high school campus we are once again reminded that we are living in a different world. The body count of students and teachers causes us to shake our heads and wonder what is going on. In some cases the shooters are teenagers with elaborate plans and evil desires. But sometimes the hail of bullets comes from impulsive kids as young as eleven years old.

In the past, when we did talk about kids killing kids, it was in an urban setting. Gangland battles between the Bloods and the Crips reminded us that life in the inner city was hard and ruthless. But the latest battlegrounds have not been Watts, the Bronx, or Cabrini-Green. These violent confrontations have taken place in rural, idyllic towns with names like Pearl, Mississippi and Paducah, Kentucky and Jonesboro, Arkansas and Littleton, Colorado.

We are shocked and surprised. We open our newspapers to see the faces of kids caught up in the occult and we wonder how they were attracted to such evil. We open those newspapers again and we see the faces of Opie and Beaver look-alikes charged with five counts of murder and we wonder if they even

understood what they were doing.

The answers from pundits have been many. Young people are desensitized to violence, and they learn to kill by using point- and-shoot video games. Teenagers are rebellious, and they are looking for a way to defy authority. In the past, that was easier to accomplish by merely violating the dress code. Today, in a society that values tolerance, trying to come up with a behavior that is shocking is getting harder and harder to do. And the social and spiritual climate that our kids live in is hardly conducive to moral living.

Kids killing kids, I believe, is the best evidence yet of a culture in chaos that has turned its back on God's moral law. Do we really believe that children can see thousands of TV murders or play violent computer games and not be tempted to act out that violence in real life? Do we think we can lower societal standards and not have kids act out in very bizarre ways? Do we think we can pull God from the schools and prayer from the classroom and see no difference in the behavior of children? We shouldn't be surprised. Kids killing kids is evidence of a nation in moral free fall.

The Media and Video Games

I would like to begin with a look at the influence of the media and video games. In the past, we have talked about the impact of violent media on our society. We shouldn't be surprised that it is having an effect on our kids.

One of the people who knows this only so well is Lt. Col. Dave Grossman. He is a retired West Point psychology professor, Army Ranger, and an expert in the study of violence in war and killing. He is also an instructor at Arkansas State University in Jonesboro, and was one of the first on the scene of the Jonesboro, Arkansas shootings. He has a lot to say.

He saw the devastation wrought by the shootings—not just the

five dead and ten wounded. He saw what happens when violence intrudes into everyday life. And, where he's been, he sees where the violence comes from. He says, "Anywhere television appears, fifteen years later, the murder rate doubles."{1}

He says, "In the video games, in the movies, on the television, the one behavior that is consistently depicted in glamorous terms and consistently rewarded is killing." He believes that media violence was a significant factor in the killings in Pearl, Mississippi, in West Paducah, Kentucky, in Jonesboro, Arkansas, in Springfield, Oregon, and in Littleton, Colorado.

He also says that the combination of a sense of inferiority and the exposure to violence can provoke violence in young boys who are "wannabes." Sometimes they see violence as a route to fame, and one has to wonder whether all the media exposure of these school shootings will spawn even more.

Consider the 1995 movie, *The Basketball Diaries*. In the film, Leonardo DiCaprio (also of *Titanic* fame) goes into a schoolroom and shoots numerous children and teachers. In doing so, he became a role model for young boys who are "wannabes."

The parents of three students killed in Paducah, Kentucky have brought a lawsuit against the company that distributed the film *The Basketball Diaries*. The parents' lawyer points out that Michael Carneal, who opened fire on a group of students in Kentucky, viewed the film and honed his shooting skills by playing computer games such as *Doom* and *Redneck Rampage*.

Dave Grossman goes into some detail in showing how violence in films, videos, and television can affect us. The parallels in his book *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of Learning to Kill in War and Society*{2} and what is happening in the media today are chilling. Two factors are desensitization and operant conditioning. Show soldiers (or children) enough visual images of violence and they will become desensitized to

it. Practice shooting targets of people and conditioning will eventually take over. In some ways it doesn't matter whether it's soldiers doing target practice at a range or kids using point-and-shoot video games. The chilling result is the same: the creation of a killing machine.

But you don't need to read Grossman's book to see the parallels. Young people today are exposed to violent images that desensitize them and make it possible for some to act out these violent images in real life. And video games help them hone their shooting skills and overcome their hesitation to kill. Dave Grossman has seen it in war, and now he is seeing it in everyday life.

Violence and Teenage Rebellion

So many words have been spoken in the last few months about school shootings that it's often difficult to hear sound commentary in the midst of the cacophony. But one voice that deserves a hearing is Jonathan Cohen who wrote a commentary in the *New York Post* entitled "Defining Rebellion Up."{3}

Years ago Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan wrote a seminal piece in an academic journal entitled "Defining Deviancy Down."{4} It was his contention that in the midst of cultural chaos we tend to redefine what is normal. When the crime rate goes through the roof, we say that crime is inevitable in a free society. When the illegitimate birth rate quadruples, we say that maybe two parents in a home aren't really necessary after all. In essence, what society has done is follow the pattern in Isaiah 5:20 of calling evil good and good evil.

Jonathan Cohen picks up on that theme and extends it to our current crisis. He says that when America became willing to define deviancy down, it simultaneously defined rebellion up. He says, "Anti-social teens are nothing new, but as deviancy has been made normal, we have made it increasingly difficult for teenagers to rebel."

Adults are no longer offended or outraged by behavior that would have sent our parents through the roof. Unfortunately, we have learned the lessons of tolerance well. We tolerate just about everything from tattoos to black nail polish to metal pierced eyebrows.

Jonathan Cohen says, “We have raised the threshold of rebellion so high that it is practically beyond reach. To be recognized, to get attention, to stir anyone in authority to lift a finger, whether it is a parent, a teacher, a principal, or a sheriff, a rebel has to go to very great lengths these days. One must send letter bombs, blow up office buildings or gun down children.”

If a young person is trying to defy authority, it does take quite a bit to be recognized. Just a few decades ago, when dress codes were still in effect a student could be somewhat rebellious without getting into too much trouble or hurting other people. Today, it apparently takes quite a bit to run afoul of those in authority.

Jonathan Cohen asks, “And what of the teachers at Columbine High? It seemed they were not disturbed at all by the boys’ odd conduct. In fact, one instructor actually helped them make a video dramatizing their death-and-destruction fantasy. For all we know, he may well have commended himself for being so nonjudgmental.”

This surfaces an important issue. The highest value in our society today has become tolerance. We are not to judge others. When you put this trend of rising rebellion with increased tolerance together, you end up with a lethal mixture.

Jonathan Cohen concludes by wondering if all of this might have been different. He says, “If teachers had forbidden their students from coming to class wearing black trenchcoats, fingernail polish and makeup, Littleton likely would not be a

name on everyone's lips. If the principal had had the common sense to ban a group of boys from coming to school sporting Nazi regalia, marching though the corridors in military fashion and calling themselves the Trench Coat Mafia, Columbine High School might not be behind a police line."

Tolerance

Tolerance has become the highest value in our society today, and I believe that it may explain why we miss the signals that something is wrong with our kids.

After the school shooting in Colorado, an editorial appeared in the *New York Post*.{5} The editorial writers said, "The Littleton massacre could prove a turning point in American society—one of those moments when the entire culture changes course." Who knows if that will be the case. Only time will tell. The editorial writers believe that one of the things that must change is our contemporary view of tolerance.

The editorial was entitled "Too Much Tolerance?" While other pundits focused on guns, video games, and other cultural phenomena, these editorial writers said the real cause was "inattention."

After all, the killers in Colorado were sending out signals of an impending calamity. It's just that no one was paying attention. For example, one Littleton parent went to the police twice about threats made on his son's life by Eric Harris. His pleas were to no avail. The cops didn't pay attention.

These kids in the Trench Coat Mafia gave each other Hitler salutes at a local bowling alley. But the community didn't pay attention.

These same kids marched down the hallways and got into fights with jocks and other kids after school. But the school didn't pay attention.

One kid’s mother works with disabled kids, but seemed unaware that her own son had a fascination with Adolf Hitler and spent a year planning the destruction of the high school. Again parents didn’t pay attention.

Throughout the article the editorial writers recount all the things these kids did. They conclude that while they “were doing everything they could to offend the community they lived in, the community chose to pay them no heed.”

Why? I believe that this tragic lack of attention is the sorry harvest of tolerance and diversity preached in the nation’s classrooms every day. We are not to judge others. The only sin in society is the sin of judgmentalism. We cannot judge hairstyles or lifestyles, manners or morals. We may think another person’s dress, actions, or lifestyles are a bit different, but we are told not to judge. Everything must be tolerated. And so we decide to ignore in the name of tolerance. In essence, inattention is the fruit of a message of tolerance and diversity.

In decades past, boundaries existed, school dress codes were enforced, and certain behavior was not allowed. As the boundaries were dropped and the lines blurred, teachers and parents learned to cope by paying less attention.

The editorial writers therefore conclude (and please excuse the bluntness of their statement) that, “The only way Americans can live like this is to tune out, to ignore, to refuse to pay attention. In the name of broad-mindedness, Littleton allowed Harris and Klebold to fall through the cracks straight to Hell.”

So why do we have kids killing kids? There are lots of reasons: the moral breakdown of society, video games, rebellion. But another reason is tolerance. We have been taught for decades not to judge, and this has given adults a license to be inattentive.

Spiritual Issues

I would like to conclude this essay by looking at some spiritual issues associated with so many of these school shootings.

Perhaps the best way to begin is to quote former Education Secretary Bill Bennett. He was on one of the talking-head shows discussing the tragedy in Littleton, Colorado. All of a sudden he turned directly to the television camera and said, "Hello?"

That was the attention-getter. But what he said afterward should also get our attention. He pointed out that these kids were walking the halls in trench coats, and apparently that didn't really get the attention of the teachers and administrators. But, he said, if a kid walked the halls with a Bible, that would probably get their attention. Something is very wrong with a society and a school system that would admonish a school kid for carrying a Bible and spreading the good news while ignoring a group of kids wearing trench coats and spreading hate.

In her *Wall Street Journal* column{6}, former presidential speech writer Peggy Noonan talked about "The Culture of Death" our children live in. She quoted headlines from news stories and frankly I can't even repeat what she quoted. Our kids are up to their necks in really awful stuff, and it comes to them day after day on television, in the movies, and in the newspapers.

She then asked, Who counters this culture of death? Well, parents do and churches do. But they aren't really given much of a place in our society today. In fact, Peggy Noonan told a story to illustrate her point.

She said, "A man called into Christian radio this morning and said a true thing. He said, and I am paraphrasing: Those kids

were sick and sad, and if a teacher had talked to one of them and said, 'Listen, there's a way out, there really is love out there that will never stop loving you, there's a real God and I want to be able to talk to you about him'—if that teacher had intervened that way, he would have been hauled into court."

You know that man who called that radio station is right. A few years ago, a very famous case made its way through the Colorado courts. A high school teacher in Colorado was taken to court merely because he had a Bible on his desk. If you haven't heard the story, I guess the conclusion wouldn't surprise you. The teacher lost the case and lost it again on appeal.

As we've talked about the disturbing phenomenon of kids killing kids, we have discussed the breakdown of society, video games, rebellion, and tolerance. But we shouldn't forget the spiritual dimension. We are reaping the harvest of a secular society.

Kids kill other kids and so we wonder why. We throw God out of the classroom, we throw the Bible out of the classroom, we throw prayer out of the classroom, and we even throw the Ten Commandments out of the classroom.

Maybe we shouldn't wonder why any longer. Maybe we should be surprised the society isn't more barbaric given the fact that so many positive, spiritual influences have been thrown out. The ultimate solution to the problem of kids killing kids is for the nation to return to God.

Notes

1. Andrea Billups and Jerry Seper, "Experts Hit Permissiveness in Schools, Violence on TV," *The Washington Times*, 22 April, 1999.

2. Dave Grossman, *On Killing: The Psychological Cost of*

Learning to Kill in War and Society (New York: Little,Brown, 1996).

3. Jonathan Cohen, “Defining Rebellion Up,” *New York Post*, 27 April 1999.

4. Daniel Patrick Moynihan, “Defining Deviancy Down,” *The American Spectator*, Winter 1993.

5.”Too Much Tolerance?” *New York Post*, 27 April 1999.

6. Peggy Noonan, “The Culture of Death,” *Wall Street Journal*, 22 April 1999.

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