The Hunger Games delivers a lesson on divine rescue

By C.S. Morrissey
Special to The B.C. Catholic

Caution: the following article contains spoilers about the new movie, The Hunger Games.

Sometimes it takes a book or a movie like The Hunger Games to show us the truth that “Human life is sacred” (Catechism of the Catholic Church #2258).

The story of Katniss Everdeen allows us to inhabit a world of the imagination where we experience, by horrible negative examples, how true it is that “no one can under any circumstance claim for himself the right directly to destroy an innocent human being” (#2258).

Jennifer Lawrence as Katniss Everdeen shoots an arrow in a scene from the movie The Hunger Games. C.S. Morrissey compares The Hunger Games to the moral teaching of the Catholic Church.

The biggest difference between the movie and the book is Rue’s death scene; in the movie it has an even greater emotional impact than in the book. Rue is Katniss’s ally, and when Rue is fatally wounded, Katniss does not leave her to die alone. Katniss sings a song to Rue and then decorates her body with flowers.

“Rue was more than a piece in their Games. And so am I,” says Katniss.

These noble actions of Katniss affirm how one can always act morally and nobly, even under terrible circumstances. Katniss shows how a true hero can always affirm human dignity, even in war.

“Even if death is thought imminent, the ordinary care owed to a sick person cannot be legitimately interrupted. The use of painkillers to alleviate the sufferings of the dying, even at the risk of shortening their days, can be morally in conformity with human dignity if death is not willed as either an end or a means, but only foreseen and tolerated as inevitable.

“Palliative care is a special form of disinterested charity. As such it should be encouraged.” (#2279).

Katniss’s charity to Rue is moving and gives good emotional testimony to the truth about human life: “Everyone is responsible for his life before God, Who has given it to him. It is God Who remains the sovereign Master of life.

“We are obliged to accept life gratefully and preserve it for His honour and the salvation of our souls. We are stewards, not owners, of the life God has entrusted to us. It is not ours to dispose of.” (#2290).

Cato is Katniss’s enemy, and when Katniss kills him, she does so reluctantly, without vengeance, to end his suffering. Nevertheless, “Whatever its motives and means, direct euthanasia consists in putting an end to the lives of handicapped, sick, or dying persons. It is morally unacceptable.

“Thus an act or omission which, of itself or by intention, causes death in order to eliminate suffering constitutes a murder gravely contrary to the dignity of the human person and to the respect due to the living God, His Creator” (#2277).

Taken literally, Katniss’s act of killing Cato has an immoral component, but its literary purpose is to symbolize how the Games have placed her and Cato in a degrading situation. The immoral Games are “eating them alive”: wolf-like, animalistic competition has devoured Cato, and it now threatens even the noble Katniss, who is pressured into taking dehumanizing action.

The stark lesson is that, in a brutal war, self-defence or self-interest is an unsteady guide to action. Noble self-sacrifice is the only morally unproblematic behaviour.

We should always resist any totalitarian government that fosters a culture of death, any tyranny that kills humans as “tributes.” (“Tribute” is the name for the competitors in The Hunger Games.)

An unjust government thinks that you should pay tribute to it with innocent human lives. Instead we should pay tribute only with charitable actions, like Katniss’s flowers and song.

When the last two survivors of the hunger games, Katniss and Peeta, threaten a double suicide, it is important to interpret this conclusion to the story in light of the truth: “Suicide contradicts the natural inclination of the human being to preserve and perpetuate his life. It is gravely contrary to the just love of self.

“It likewise offends love of neighbour because it unjustly breaks the ties of solidarity with family, nation, and other human societies to which we continue to have obligations. Suicide is contrary to love for the living God” (#2281).

Taken literally, their attempted suicide was wrong: “If suicide is committed with the intention of setting an example, especially to the young, it also takes on the gravity of scandal. Voluntary co-operation in suicide is contrary to the moral law” (#2282).

But the message of the story seems to be instead that their action is primarily symbolic. It expresses, not a desire to die, but rather a desire to subvert the romantic cliché of tragic “star-crossed” lovers (think Romeo and Juliet), the cynical media narrative imposed on them by the Gamemakers, by turning it into an act of resistance against the manipulative Capitol tyranny.

In this interpretation they only want to pretend to commit suicide, in order to fool the Gamemakers into changing the rules. They use a literary symbol of “love” to outwit the Games. Their intention is apparently not to do evil to bring about good, which is always immoral.

“The end does not justify the means.”

Letters to the Editor

Gray colours pro-life debate

Re: “Pro-life group claims biased coverage” in the March 19 issue:

Stephanie Gray should be lauded for the admirable job she and her organization do in this regard.

The aim of the Canadian Centre for Bioethical Reform (CCBR) is to depict the horror of abortion, so what does Celia Posyniak of the Kensington Clinic expect? She claims the killing of a baby is not a crime. I wonder what her definition of a crime is?

We know full well that a fetus is a baby in the making. Pro-abortionists contest this view, but can they prove that the fetus is not a living thing and not a potential baby?

We have enough proof because we all started off as fetuses, but can the abortionists prove otherwise? I rest my case.

Doris Joseph
Vancouver

Gray discours pro-life debate

Re: “Pro-life group claims biased coverage” in the March 19 issue:

Stephanie Gray and her ilk call themselves a pro-life group, but they clearly do not have any education on the different types of abortion.

When you make a comment about people who have had “aborted” you are categorizing all of those who have had all types of abortions, including spontaneous abortions, therapeutic abortions, induced abortions.

I assume you don’t know this, but a spontaneous abortion is also known as a miscarriage.

Just thinking about this article puts knots in my stomach. How do you think a woman who has had a spontaneous abortion feels seeing a postcard with a dead baby on it? Do you care about anyone else’s feelings?

God forbid you ever have to go through that, but if you did, you probably wouldn’t be so heartless and selfish to even think of such a twisted idea.

Candice Jones
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Teens lack faith formation

By paying more attention to the need for faith formation for our teens we might not change the world, but we would certainly prepare teens to better face their challenges in today’s society. We would also keep more teens practising their faith for His honour and the salvation of our souls. We are stewards, not owners, of the life God has entrusted to us. It is not ours to dispose of.” (#2290).

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This would lead to more stable Catholic families and more children who have mom and dad under the same roof.

We would also have less abortions. I have had girls in my classes who thought it would be okay to go for an abortion if they got pregnant as teens.

We are not getting to all our teens, who really need our help. We need to do more.

Steve De Jong
Surrey

We invite readers to send letters commenting on issues discussed in the community or within the pages of this publication. Letters must have an address and phone number for verification. Letters may be edited for style, clarity, and length. Letters can be mailed, emailed, or sent through our online contact form: http://www.bcatholic.ca/contact.
Sins of the flesh easily tempt our permissive society

By Paul Kokoski
Special to The B.C. Catholic

At Fatima our Blessed Mother told Bl. Jacinta Marto, “More souls go to Hell for the sins of the flesh than for any other reason.”

Today we are living in an extremely sexually permissive society. Temptations to sins of the flesh are everywhere: from billboards, art, advertising, newspapers, television, music and the Internet to the way people dress.

Even human law encourages sexual depravity and lust with its legalization of contraceptives, prostitution, swingers clubs, homosexual behaviour, and “same-sex marriage.”

It is a big business that victimizes everyone, including those who market and sell it.

The Internet especially makes it possible for pornography to enter every home with its potential of corrupting whole families, including children. It is degrading, ruins family relations, and leads to everything from incest, adultery, prostitution, and violence to human trafficking and murder.

In order to conquer these temptations to hedonism and reach heaven we must be constantly on guard to repel and overcome our tendencies toward lust.

What is the nature of lust? Just as God has willed to attach pleasure to our nutritive appetites for the purpose of man’s self-preservation so He has attached a special pleasure to the act of sex for the propagation of the human species. This pleasure is only permissible within marriage.

Unfortunately we have a tendency to abuse this desire. This tendency, more violent in some than others, is called lust and is condemned by both the 6th and 9th commandments: “Thou shall not commit adultery” and “Thou shall not covet thy neighbour’s wife.”

These commandments not only prohibit external actions but internal fancies, thoughts, and desires. Why? When we dwell on impure thoughts and desires the senses become excited and can be a prelude to actions against purity.

Thus Christ warned: “Anyone who looks at a woman lustfully has already committed adultery with her in his heart” (Mt 5:28).

Sins against impurity are often grave. To seek and to direct will evil pleasure is a mortal sin.

Acts that are unnecessary and which give rise to pleasure, such as dangerous reading, shows, conversations, lewd dancing, etc., are sins of imprudence. They are more or less grave according to the gravity of the disorder produced and of the danger of consent to the evil pleasure.

If pleasure indirectly follows from actions that are good, and one does not consent to them, there is no guilt.

We are all called to perfection. Impure acts lead to tyrannical habits and incline the will further toward debasing pleasure. They dry up one’s love for prayer and virtue and make one prey to selfishness. The mind too becomes dull and weak because the vital forces are sapped.

Then a fertile soil is prepared where the defiance gravitates toward lower things; the heart gradually withers, hardens, and is attracted only by degrading pleasures. Even physical attributes, like the nervous system, are affected.

To withstand the dangerous passion of lust we need deep conviction, protection against dangerous occasions of sin, mortification, and prayer.

Deep convictions about the risk of eternal punishment are necessary to combat this vice. In light of our own frailty, we also need to avoid the occasions of lust. This is especially true with unnecessary occasions. When these occasions cannot be avoided, we must strengthen the will by intentional dispositions that make the danger more remote.

St. Francis de Sales declared that if dances cannot be avoided they should at least be indulged in with modesty, self-respect, and good intentions. How much more necessary is this today, when so many indecent dances are in vogue?

Occasions that we cannot avoid in our daily encounters can be overcome only by mortification. The eyes, for example, should be especially guarded, for impairing glances entangle desires which in turn entice the will. Hence Our Lord declared: “If your right eye is an occasion of sin it must be plucked out” (Mt 5:29).

The sense of touch is often a prelude to actions against whatever may be decent. It is an occasion of sin and must be mortified.

Getting to heaven is not easy today, because of the onslaught of sexual permissiveness. Defence against this requires courage, earnestness, and repeated effort, but with prayer, the sacraments, and a determined will we can surmount all obstacles.

St. Francis de Sales said: “Greater love hath no man, than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends” (Jn 15:13).

No worldly game can ever satisfy our soul’s hunger. Every worldly victory is a lesser “victory” that misses the mark. Katniss’s world, our world, still cries out for true love, for divine rescue: the Resurrection.

C.S. Morrissey is a professor of philosophy at Redeemer Pacific College.