

The Hunger Games delivers a lesson on divine rescue

By C.S. Morrissey
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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).



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



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.



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” (#2280).

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 chari-

table 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 is 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

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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 Posyniac 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 discolours 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 “abortions” 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
Vancouver

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, and our, Catholic faith.

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

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Best wishes for all the blessings of the Easter season

Catholic Civil Rights League www.ccr1.ca
Inquiries welcome: ccr1@ccr1.ca or 416-466-8244

Film's literal message is absolutely false

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means” (#1753).

They intend, rather, to resist the culture of death with a symbolic gesture. In the face of tyranny, they want to affirm their human dignity and to bear witness to the transforming power of sacrificial love.

Supporting this interpretation are the many brave and selfless actions taken by Katniss and Peeta in the story, especially Katniss's willingness to offer her life in place

of that of her sister, Primrose.

Still, the suicide pact remains uncomfortable and unsettling, not just because the whole story was conceived as a satire portraying many unsavory elements in today's media-driven culture of death, but because the story's ending seems to say we can't "win" in such a culture unless we do, or threaten to do, something morally wrong like suicide.

Taken literally, this message is absolutely false. Per-

haps it is meant only as social satire. But symbolically, on a deeper level, it is not wrong to suggest that only true love can bring us life and thereby rescue us from death. However, this disharmony in the story, between the literal and the symbolic, fails to feed the spiritual hunger in our souls.

That's why the supreme example that no book or movie can surpass, and which must be the measure to guide our imaginations, is found in Christ: "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.

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