

A Catholic take on the vampire vogue

By C.S. Morrissey
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Should Catholics see the movie *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*? “If they have an open mind and can look beyond the surface level stuff,” said Kathleen Glasgow. The Redeemer Pacific College student was sent by The B.C. Catholic to examine the film.

“They don’t have to – it would be perfectly fine never seeing it – but I like to delve deeper and try to find good things.”

Glasgow noted two details in the novel still implicit in the movie, but not made as explicit: the identification of Marcus of the Volturi with the St. Marcus of St. Marcus Day and the tracing of humanity’s mythical superstitions about vampires to Marcus’s deliberate misrepresentations.

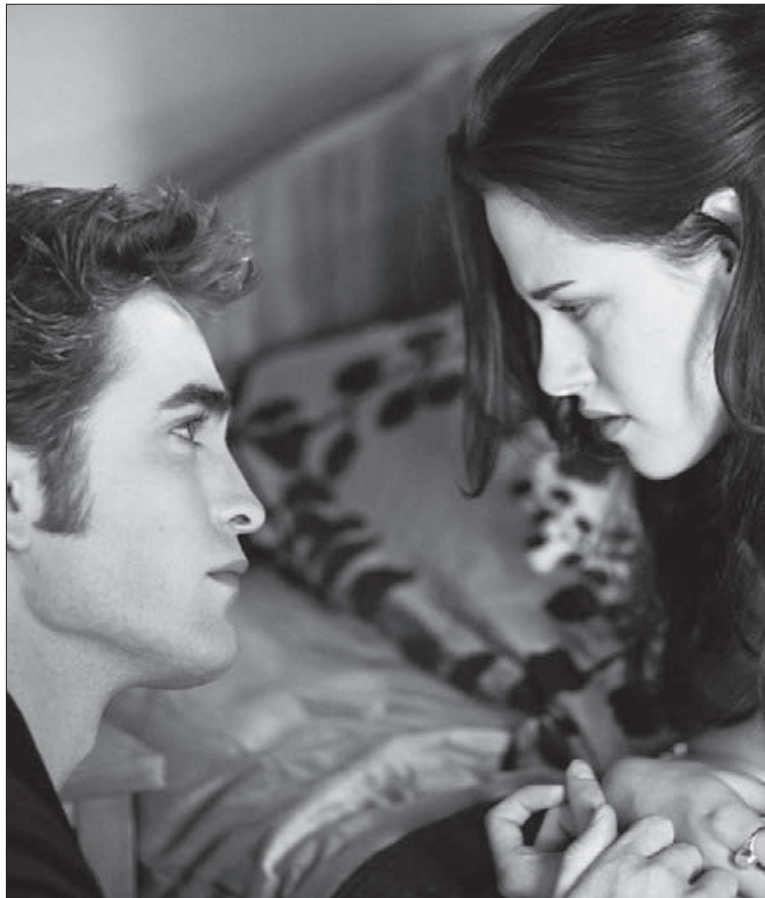
In the world of Stephenie Meyer’s novels, most vampires are nomadic, to avoid discovery – they hunt in one place and then move on – but the de facto “royal family” of vampires, the Volturi, stay and don’t hunt in their home city of Volterra, Italy.

In Meyer’s fictional world, St. Marcus Day (for her, March 19) is the day on which St. Marcus supposedly rid Volterra of all vampires. However that day commemorates what is really a myth generated by Marcus the vampire to allow the Volturi to secretly live in the city.

The “vampire royalty” enforces one rule: don’t expose vampires to the outside world. The main event of the *New Moon* film hinges on Edward almost exposing himself and thereby destroying the myth generated by Marcus as cover for the vampires.

The Feast of St. Mark, who wrote one of the four Gospels, is on April 25. He has nothing to do with vampires. Implicit to the story of *New Moon*, then, is this idea that the truth about vampires cannot really be found in the Catholic tradition, which is merely a “myth” beneath which the deeper truth about vampires lurks.

Because the movie does not make this theme explicit, it is more unlike than like Dan Brown’s nonsensical *Da Vinci Code* (which is based on a similar claim to reveal the “truth” about what really lies



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Robert Pattinson and Kristen Stewart star in a scene from the movie *The Twilight Saga: New Moon*. Bella chooses Edward over Jacob, the movie’s new rival for Bella’s affections.

behind Christianity).

Ironically, the movie’s vampire mythology instead functions as an invitation to “delve deeper” into Catholic truth. Any “good things” that may be found in the mythical world of *New Moon* are subtle pointers to the deeper truths about reality taught by Catholic tradition.

For example, the “*New Moon*” of the story’s title is a symbol of Bella’s depression after Edward leaves her. “It reminded me of the Dark Night of the Soul,” said Glasgow, likening Bella’s separation from Edward to the sense of loneliness and desolation that may occur in a Christian’s spiritual life.

“You know God is there only on an intellectual level, but every other sense tells you he’s gone. You know what it feels like to have ‘the great love,’ but now suddenly you can’t find it.”

Is it too much of a stretch to see the *Twilight Saga* as pointing to such spiritual experience?

nied. The instinct for God and for a world that transcends the realm of ordinary experience is hardwired into us, and thus our desire, thwarted by the enviroing culture, will produce some distorted version of transcendence, some ersatz spirituality. Hence the world of vampires.”

“Besides blood-sucking” (vampire mythology’s distorted version of Catholics being truly made part of an immortal family by sharing in the blood of Christ), Father Barron writes, “the distinguishing mark of vampires is immortality: they are the undead, the eternally young. Though the materialist ideology around us insists that we are no more than clever animals who will fade away at death, deep within us is the sure sense that we are more than that.”

In the *Twilight Saga*, this sense of our being destined for “something more” is embodied in the story of Bella and Edward’s love. As Pope Benedict XVI teaches in his encyclical letter *God is Love* (No. 5), “there is a certain relationship between love and the Divine: love promises infinity, eternity – a reality far greater and totally other than our everyday existence.

“Yet we have also seen that the way to attain this goal is not simply by submitting to instinct. Purification and growth in maturity are called for; and these also pass through the path of renunciation. Far from rejecting or ‘poisoning’ eros, they heal it and restore its true grandeur.”

Hence, in *Twilight*, audiences are thrilled by the grandeur of Edward and Bella’s love, a love that, in embarking upon purification, abstains from sexual consummation.

Hence Bella’s “dark night of the soul” in *New Moon* is the path of undergoing further purification of her eros. “Eros, reduced to pure ‘sex,’ has become a commodity, a mere ‘thing’ to be bought and sold” in our culture, writes the Pope in *God is Love*.

The *New Moon* story, despite being a mass consumerist phenomenon, ironically bears witness to a deeper truth. As Pope Benedict put it in his encyclical: “eros tends to rise ‘in ecstasy’ towards the Divine, to lead us beyond ourselves; yet for this very reason it calls for a path of ascent, renunciation, purification, and healing.”

This is the deeper significance of the mythical vampire story in *New Moon*, a story in essence all about Bella choosing Edward over Jacob, the movie’s new rival for Bella’s affections.

This story about vampires points to the deeper Catholic truth taught today by our Pope: “It is part of love’s growth towards higher levels and inward purification that it now seeks to become definitive, and it does so in a twofold sense: both in the sense of exclusivity (this particular person alone) and in the sense of being ‘for ever.’”

“Love embraces the whole of existence in each of its dimensions, including the dimension of time. It could hardly be otherwise, since its promise looks towards its definitive goal: love looks to the eternal” (Benedict XVI, *God is Love* No. 6).

As Glasgow observes, all purified human love looks toward what Edward, upon Bella’s reunion with him, names “heaven.”

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