



*I struggled to believe what had happened.
The bullies pressed in.
The victim went down.
Blood dashed the air.
The crowd, at first stunned, began finally to call out for more.
They handed it out until they killed Him.
It was an awful time.
Crucifixion.*

Too much blood & gore

By David Argue

Jesus ... taken down that we might find a way up to God.

We were redeemed that way — through blood and gore.

It was so horrible to look on that it was said men would hide their faces (Isaiah 53:3).

Now in the light of unfolded time, we know what was happening was the brutal outworking of substitutionary atonement — the final act in the whole process God established whereby innocent life laid down could provide for the guilty to be forgiven of sin.

At first it was the innocent life of a lamb or the guilt-bearing frame of a goat that symbolically made the way. This time it had become Jesus, the Lamb of God, who was brutalized and killed as a genuine and final substitute for us all. As we believe in what Jesus did and ask God, because of Christ's actions, to forgive our

sins, we are truly forgiven. We begin a journey through life and into eternity at peace with God.

Glorious wonder and divine mystery then, that millions have come to worship at a place of such inhumane suffering ... the cross.

If we had been there that day, surely we would have hidden our faces.

The sacredness of life implores that we would turn away.

The awfulness of the suffering cries out "don't look."

The frailty of the Sufferer wrenches the gut and closes the eyes.

Normally,

Today, however, with digital ease, blood and gore are accessed by millions.

Why?

For the racing pulse it can bring.

For the one-more-time conquest of fabricated good over fabricated evil.

For the power it seems to project on the viewer.

For the entertaining "wow"

features built into it.

We call it gratuitous violence — a conundrum — a violence that pleasures.

And it is more and more the fare of many ... even the very young. Research has revealed again and again the effects of televised violence on children. The clear result? Watching violence desensitizes children ... and adults. It causes us to react less and less as we view more and more violence. The pulse, spiked at first, slows and slows with each exposure.

The eye movements, irritated at the start of violent viewing, finally watch with little reaction at all. The revulsion that is normal when we encounter blood and gore in real life is dulled. The fight or flight responses built into our humanity get slowly snuffed. (Have you come across any news items lately about people who just watched, unmoved, when encountering very real violence right in front of them?)

Desensitized.

The apostle Paul spelled out the downward spiral that occurs as a result of evil that has torn deeply into the soul: "Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more" (Ephesians 4:19, NIV).

Desensitized and heading to the depths of depravity.

Some forms of portrayed violence, someone might protest, are simply innocuous. "I can handle it," is a common argument. Jesus suggests we would do well to think more comprehensively and personally. His diagnosis: People love darkness because their deeds are evil (John 3:19).

Jesus would issue a challenge to each of us: What do you want to really see? Violence and gore, or God?

Christ reminds us it is the "pure in heart" who "will see God" (Matthew 5:8).

"Darkness" — it's a code

word for what happens when the "lights" of truth, justice, kindness, forgiveness, peace and love go out. Peter, close friend of Jesus and spokesman for the Early Church, would write that God has "called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Peter 2:9).

Here's a simple self-test.

Think back to a blood and gore scene you can remember.

Got it?

Now pour these words over the images you have just brought to mind. "Add to your faith goodness; and to goodness ... self-control; and to self-control ... godliness; and to godliness, brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. But if anyone does not have them, he is nearsighted and blind, and

continued on page 25



but...
God!

**You killed the author of life,
but God raised him from the dead.
We are witnesses of this.**
— ACTS 3:15, NIV

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L. John Bueno, executive director
Assemblies of God World Missions



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Too
much
blood &
gore

has forgotten that he has been cleansed from his past sins" (2 Peter 1:5-9).

Here are some questions to ask ourselves about the viewing of gratuitous blood and gore:

- Does whatever is before me bring on spiritual nearsightedness and even blindness?
 - Can those behaviors and that type of activity mix with the qualities that bring Jesus into clearer focus and welcome His presence?
 - Did viewing this strengthen my faith or erode it? (See Romans 14:23 for Paul's much simpler test.)
- In preparing to write these words I reread large portions of

the New Testament and somewhere along the way two additional points of truth began to become rather clear to me.

First, no amount of rule-making and becoming grim-faced in endless efforts at self-control will suffice in our blood and gore culture — at least not for very long.

Second, there is an answer to it all. Rather than trying to snuff out the darkness, just turn up the light.

C.S. Lewis (of *Chronicles of Narnia* fame) put it this way: "Our Lord finds our desires not too strong, but too weak. We are half-hearted creatures, fooling about with drink and sex and ambition [and I would add

"violence"] when infinite joy is offered us. Like an ignorant child who wants to go on making mud pies in a slum because he cannot imagine what is meant by the offer of a holiday at the sea, we are far too easily pleased" (*The Weight of Glory*, Eerdmans, 1949, pp.1,2).

Go for the joy, the "holiday at the sea."

Stay clear of the mud.

And, turn up the light. **tpe**

DAVID ARGUE is director of Church Development and HonorBound: Men of Promise for the Rocky Mountain District of the Assemblies of God.

E-mail your comments to tpe@ag.org.

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