

Zombies, Vampires: Dark Themes Invade Christian Homes

A zombie invasion and a vampire love triangle. These are the themes of two hit television dramas, AMC's *The Walking Dead* and CW's *The Vampire Diaries*.

In today's entertainment industry, tales of blood-sucking lovers and brain-eating corpses are big business. From *Twilight*, a best-selling series of books and movies focusing on **vampires**, to *Warm Bodies*, a recent film about a teen zombie in love, it seems many consumers can't get enough of the creepy and macabre.

The undead genre, as it is sometimes called, is wildly popular among adolescents and young adults. Some national bookstore chains have entire sections devoted to "teen paranormal romance," featuring such titles as *Boys That Bite* and *I Kissed a Zombie, and I Liked It*.

Similar motifs are showing up in literature aimed at the youngest readers. Book series such as *Vampirates* and *Diary of a Zombie Kid* are recommended for elementary-aged children.

"It's a very lucrative market," says Candy Tolbert, director of National Girls Ministries for the Assemblies of God. "Girls as young as 11 are being sucked into this fantasy world where death and spiritual perversion are glamorized."

Heath Adamson, Assemblies of God National Youth Ministries director and a father of two preteens, says these are old themes repackaged for a new generation. He believes ancient pagan practices of worshipping the dead and early horror films depicting Dracula and decomposing monsters have elements in common with today's morbid entertainment.

"We are spiritual beings in mortal bodies," Adamson says.

“There is a longing for eternity deep inside every person. Romans 8:19 tells us creation waits for the children of God to be revealed. The enemy is very good at perverting the things God has placed in the hearts of people.”

Adamson says Christians should be wary of entertainment that romanticizes **spiritual darkness**. He should know. Before he became a Christian, Adamson says he was involved in **occult** practices.

“I’ve seen people who were demonized, and as a Christian I’ve exercised authority in Jesus’ name,” Adamson says. “There’s nothing fun or entertaining about the demonic world. Once we encounter the truth of Christ, counterfeit spirituality is no longer attractive.”

Adamson does see a bright side to this dark trend, however.

“I’m more encouraged than discouraged,” he says. “There has never been a generation more ripe for a Pentecostal expression of the gospel. Our culture is fixated on the supernatural. The Holy Spirit is the true form of what Satan is trying to counterfeit with this undead trend. Rather than talking about what we’re against, we need to talk about who Jesus is and what we stand for.”

Arnold T. Blumberg, an author and professor who taught a course on **zombies** at the University of Baltimore, says scary stories provide insight into a culture’s unspoken fears, struggles and insecurities.

“The zombie functions as an allegory for all sorts of things that play out in our country, whether it’s the threat of communism during the Cold War or our fears about bioterrorism,” Blumberg says. “It’s relatively easy to connect the zombie to what is happening in culture.”

Glen Ryswyk, an AG chaplain and clinical director of the Christian Family Counseling Center in Lawton, Okla., says

people who are hurting may unconsciously identify with the terror and turmoil depicted in horror plots.

“The darkness they are finding in this fantasy world is consistent with the way they feel about themselves on the inside,” Ryswyk says. “These horrible images of zombies with decaying flesh may be an accurate reflection of the brokenness of their souls.”

Ryswyk says condemnation does little to change hearts. Instead, he says, the church needs to reach out with genuine demonstrations of Christ’s love.

“People often retreat into dark fantasies because they don’t know how to be whole,” Ryswyk says. “But when they are received with grace and acceptance, that is incredibly powerful.”

Brenda Spina, a family therapist and licensed AG minister, warns that parents should prayerfully monitor what their kids watch and read.

“The brain must work overtime in younger people to manage the fright responses they may experience because of the sights and sounds exposed to them,” says Spina, owner and director of the Center for Family Healing in Appleton, Wis. “Multiple studies indicate the effects last long into adulthood due to the trauma response of the brain.”

A study by the Center for Communication Research at the University of Wisconsin-Madison found that college students who watched horror movies, such as *Poltergeist* and *It*, before age 14 were more likely to suffer from sleep problems and irrational fears.

“These findings certainly argue for parental and caregiver caution when choosing appropriate media fare for young people,” wrote Joanne Cantor, the study’s author. “Making the wrong choice of a movie or a TV show can alter a person’s life

in very intense, distressful and irrational ways. Understanding the long-term consequences of media exposure is critical to ensuring the long-term emotional health of young people.”

Adamson says it isn’t enough for parents to forbid certain forms of **entertainment**. He says parents need to be aware of cultural trends and the choices their children face so parents can explain their beliefs and the Bible’s teachings on these topics.

“Scripture is clear there is an afterlife and a supernatural realm,” Adamson says. “Heaven is real, and hell is real. There are angels and evil spirits, but there’s no such thing as ghosts, vampires or zombies. All of these monsters are fabrications of the imagination. We need to go to Scripture first so we can know the truth and learn to honor the Lord with our lives.”

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