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How to Fight Evil: Lessons for the Church on Spiritual Warfare from Bram Stoker's *Dracula*

Abstract

Dracula by Bram Stoker is an amazing piece of writing that is often misrepresented. Some Christians dismiss it because of the skewed belief that to enjoy life and literature is somehow less holy, and *Dracula* is also dismissed because of the judgment that books with blood, horror, and monsters cannot possibly grow us in holiness or teach us anything good. Not only is it forgotten that God created us to enjoy beauty, but also, to the second reason, the Bible itself contains blood, horror, and monsters; indeed, the Bible contains much more! Another unfortunate reality is that in the Western Church in general spiritual warfare is treated too lightly and perhaps not even addressed Biblically. Resisting sin to the point of shedding blood? (Heb. 12:3-4). Destroying arguments and every lofty opinion raise against the knowledge of God? Taking every thought captive? (2nd Cor. 10:3-5). We coast instead of swim against the stream. We fall asleep when Jesus has asked us to pray and be on the alert (Mt. 26:41). Besides captivating you with its beautiful prose, Stoker's *Dracula* has the power to arouse you from spiritual slumber if you would only believe. Theologically enriching all the way through, Stoker's *Dracula* presents its readers with Biblical truths they desperately need such as the reminder that real evil beings exist as formidable foes outside of oneself, the truth that the only way to fight the evil is by loving one another and fighting against it *together*, and lastly, the hope that evil, no matter how frightening, can be thwarted if one gives the battle his or her all. Good will win but not without the loss of much blood.

Keywords

Dracula, spiritual warfare, faith, rationalism, cross

Cover Page Footnote

Bronwyn Gray has five years of high school teaching experience and is currently an English graduate student at Liberty University. She has a bachelor's degree in Biblical studies and education and a certificate in TESL. She has taught in Cambodia, India, Canada, and the U.S. Bronwyn's primary passion is to know Jesus Christ.

Amy was at her wits end. She had experienced counseling—two different kinds; she had shared her problem and sought advice from different friends and mentors. She had prayed, read the Bible, and for years been a faithful Christian, and still, the strong draw toward evil remained and she was tormented with great shame for experiencing her secret temptation. Her fear of succumbing to "it" had resulted in broken relationships and more hurt that she now needed to work through and receive healing from. Amy had hoped a relocation and a new job would solve her internal problem, but alas, after all her work was done, she was faced with the same struggle and pain. "God, please," she begged one day. "At the prayer meeting tonight, would You bring healing?" Amy had planned that night to go to a Pentecostal prayer meeting. She was not Pentecostal, but one of her new friends was, so Amy went in desperation, in the hopes of a life-changing encounter. Amy didn't even know exactly what she needed, the situation now seemed so complex, but Amy knew she couldn't continue living with her burden. The bewildering problem she faced had given her nightmares, stolen her peace, and was hindering her from healthy relationships, from growing spiritually, and from fulfilling the calling God had on her life.

In Bram Stoker's *Dracula*, another young woman named Lucy Westenra faces a perplexing problem—a problem for which "normal" rationalistic methods do not work. Described by *Dracula* scholar Leonard Wolfe as "silly, transparent, gushy, giggly, beautiful, and good" (Klinger xlvi), poor, desirable Lucy dies. And the beloved lady dies because her friends do not realize the true nature of her problem in time—that she was not afflicted by an illness but was under spiritual attack by real, palpable evil that manifested itself physically in the form of a vampire. Her physical and mental illness was directly tied to Count Dracula's actions to destroy her and transform or rather *deform* her to "the dark side."

When people think of *Dracula*, they often think of that which is disgusting and wicked, perhaps even what is believed by some to be sexy and "cool." But, according to Melanie Phillips's 2020 report in *The Times*, *Dracula* reflects the power of Christianity in "an endless battle between good *and* evil" (emphasis, mine). It is not one-sided. Though the religious theme in *Dracula* has long been neglected by scholars and in many contemporary depictions, according to Kreitzer (191), Duran points out that "religious imagery and practice are explicit throughout the story," and there are "numerous impromptu prayers and reverent references to God" ("Stoker's *Dracula* as Christian Fiction"). Indeed, Wolfe describes *Dracula* as a display of "the perpetual tension between the dark and the light; the wrestling match between Christ and Satan" (Kreitzer 190). It is because of this that the Christian church desperately needs the reminders of Biblical truths that *Dracula* powerfully portrays. *Dracula* convinces its readers that real evil beings exist as formidable foes outside of oneself; it teaches that the only way to fight evil is by loving one another and fighting against it together, and lastly, it

reminds us that evil, no matter how frightening, can be thwarted, but one must give the battle his or her all. Good wins but not without the loss of much blood.

Though Phillips tells us in her 2020 report there has been an upsurge of interest in magic and superstition among the general populace, Barna research reveals that most American Christians do not believe that Satan exists, in contrast to what the Bible says about what the Christian's enemy is—the unholy trinity (Duran 24). This unholy trinity consists of the world: its wrong way of thinking, the flesh: one's sinful desires, and the devil and his minions: real spiritual beings who hate humans and especially Christians with a passion. Ephesians 6:12 says the Christian's battle is not against other humans but against evil forces—demons—and therefore, Christians need to put on the whole armor of God in order to defend themselves successfully.

In *Dracula*, one also encounters professing Christians who have a hard time thinking outside of what is rational from a modern, scientific perspective. According to Sage, Jonathan Harker represents Western Rationalism (177). For example, he meticulously writes down all the details of his journey to Count Dracula's castle in shorthand. Also, he is described by his employer as a young lawyer "full of energy and talent...and of a very faithful disposition" (Stoker 43), and he expresses his disregard for religious symbols like the crucifix he is given for protection by an old woman (Stoker 33). Sage continues, "He (Jonathan) represents the 'liberal' belief in the process of the human spirit away from backward looking, theologically dominated cultures—the kind of position celebrated in W.E.H. Lecky's, *The Rise of Rationalism in Europe*, written at more or less the same time as this novel (*Dracula*)" (177). Indeed, Jonathan could represent the nominal Christian who embodies the spirit of the present day or even the new atheist who only believes in that which can be proven.

However, slowly, over time, Jonathan becomes convinced that there is more to life than what he has been taught in church and college. There are some things, some experiences of horror and suffering, some experiences of coincidences too coincidental for which there are no adequate, logical explanations. After two weeks of imprisonment in Count Dracula's lair, Jonathan writes in his journal, "unless my senses deceive me, the old centuries had, and have, powers of their own which mere 'modernity' cannot kill" (Stoker 62), acknowledging powers in existence that not even science can quantify or eliminate.

It is helpful to note *Dracula's* historical context. Stoker published the book in 1897, in the aftermath of another major publication—Charles Darwin's *On the Origin of Species* (1859). Europe was undergoing a major worldview shift from absolute truth and God-centeredness to relative truth and man-centeredness. Matthew Arnold, in his love poem, "Dover Beach," written in 1851, speaks of "The Sea of Faith" now

"withdrawing" and contrary to the optimism in progress that characterized the Victorian Age due to the industrial revolution and man's supposed enlightenment, Arnold writes dismally of the lack of certitude, real joy, love, meaning, and help for pain that throwing out God reveals (Ryken 130). Sage informs that Stoker, an Irish Protestant (50), wrote into this historical context "an elaborate attack on facile skepticism, purblind belief in 'progress' and scientific materialism" (54). In a critical moment of the story, Dr. John Seward is told you must "believe in things that you cannot" (Stoker 205). John's former beloved university teacher is almost exasperated in his efforts to convince his favorite former pupil to believe. As Van Helsing says more than once throughout the story, keeping an open mind to the possibility of the impossible is crucial to life—and, as it turns out, the lives of others! Like Gandalf from *The Lord of the Rings*, Sage writes, "The figure of Van Helsing, far from a scientist, is that of a vigilant Priest, a mirror-image of Dracula (his eyebrows meet in the middle too) who fights him with white magic and persuades the rest of the novel's cast to help him" (55). *Dracula* would not be complete and surely, Dracula himself would not have been defeated without the party's fearless leader, Van Helsing, a man portrayed as very intelligent and faith-filled.

It is in our materialistic society that *Dracula* also poses a challenge. Indeed, Wixson advocates that *Dracula* even be seen as proselytizing propaganda (Starrs). Like John Seward, we are also asked to believe, to be open to the possibility of the "Un-dead" and with the acknowledgment of real evil, thankfully, real goodness as well. Duran writes, "A world without God is a world in which good and evil are meaningless concepts, in which there are no monsters or demons, only differences and misunderstandings. The moment you contemplate that the Devil hates you and has a horrible plan for your life, the jig is up" (6). This is exactly what we see take place in the novel. Once the central gang of Mina and Jonathan Harker, Van Helsing, John Seward, Quincey Morris, and Arthur Holmwood, accept that good and evil are not meaningless concepts but that there are monsters and demons and a devil who is prowling about, seeking someone to devour (1st Peter 5:8), they live differently, and in our faithful band, their best traits come to life. It is as if Stoker was addressing the terror aroused by Darwinian evolution, that humans might turn out to be no different from the animal world, "civilization merely the thinnest of veneers masking our bestial nature" (Phillips). Stoker answers this with a resounding "No!" in showcasing humans successfully resisting evil's enticements and eventually defeating the source.

Even the lunatic and devout follower of Dracula, Renfield, is shown in the end to choose good, in his sacrificial defense of Mina (Stoker 284).

Readers are convinced of the existence of evil beings in *Dracula*; indeed, Stoker has their hair standing on end, and then, in contrast, to the hate, the sexual

perversity, and the isolation of Dracula, that evil must be fought by love and unity is beautifully and compellingly portrayed. But first, to fight evil beings, one must choose to believe in their existence like all the characters come to terms with in their own way; then one must acknowledge that evil really is evil and deserves to be nothing but resisted, despised, and destroyed. Once the characters are at this point (and these points truly are more cyclical than linear as we see in the story), they are ready to fight evil together through the power of a love that can even overwhelm death. Harter was correct when he wrote that "Dracula's great nemesis is the power of the gospel," for the most frequent instrument Van Helsing uses to defeat the Count is the cross, the word crucifix occurring twenty times in the book (Kreitzer 191). Kreitzer informs, "Throughout the novel the cross is surrounded by a sense of reverence; it is held in respect and it is recognized as possessing great protective power. Indeed, it is perhaps the primary means of defense against the evil Count Dracula, with garlic flowers and communion wafers and hawthorn bushes serving as supplementary weapons in the vampire killer's armory" (185). Just as the cross has always been an unlikely means of salvation and victory (1st Corinthians 1:18), so the team's tools were unlikely, weapons that required faith in order to be implemented and in order to effect change.

The cross is the symbol of love and victory, for it is in giving one's blood and life that more life is created, and death is "reversed backward" (Lewis) through Christ's subsequent resurrection, which all the characters would have professed to have believed in. While Count Dracula, is the Anti-Christ "annexing the blood of individuals for his ever-growing empire of the Un-dead" (Sage 54), Jesus, the only innocent one and God Himself, dies in place of guilty rebels who have defied Him, the ultimate example of love for one's enemies. Jesus knew, as did Dracula, that "the life is in the blood" (Deut. 12:23), and so He permitted Himself to be sacrificed, to suffer unjustly, so others would not have to suffer and instead could receive healing. As Isaiah 53:5 says, it is "by His wounds (that) we are healed."

One thing that Dracula says really sets him apart from Christ. He tells Jonathan while they are both still in his lair, "I have been so long master that I would be master still—or at least that none other should be master of me" (Stoker 47). Dracula is determined to be in control. His "love" for Mina is not true love which allows the other person to choose but is a counterfeit—lust at its worse. Jesus gives and receives love, and so He opens Himself up to rejection. He allows people to hurt Him—emotionally and physically. He also, the Master of Masters, submits to human authorities and to God the Father. Philippians 2 says He willingly laid aside His privileges as God and humbled Himself to take the form of a slave, be born here on earth, live as a human, and die in the worst possible way to bring salvation to people who do not deserve it at all. The Count, in contrast, is selfish at his core and only thinks about self-preservation and

whatever serves his own interest.

Like Christ then can be seen as starkly different from Dracula, so can Van Helsing, Jonathan, and all the rest of the vampire-hunting squad. They defeat Dracula not only by the superstitious methods such as garlic and hypnosis but primarily by the love that compels them to persevere, resilient in the face of such extraordinary wickedness and power which would cause the normal human to crumble in despair. The noble and courageous band could have given up in their pursuit of Dracula once he left England. He was no longer an immediate threat to them. They had scared him off. Hadn't they fulfilled their mission? Hadn't they had enough stress already? But the band presses on to fight Dracula in his own territory out of love for Mina, who needs the Count destroyed to have a peaceful eternity, and out of love that Dracula did not take] one more soul. Speaking of the group's vow that Mina not become a vampire, Van Helsing preaches,

“This must not be! We have sworn together that it must not. Thus are we ministers of God's own wish: that the world, and men for whom His Son die, will not be given over to monsters, whose very existence would defame Him. He have allowed us to redeem one soul already, and we go out as the old knights of the Cross to redeem more. Like them we shall travel towards the sunrise; and like them, if we fall, we fall in good cause” (Stoker 319).

Being a talented communicator, Van Helsing can often articulate what the rest of the group feels and thinks as well. In the above speech, one hears the whole group's determination to fight tooth and nail against the Count for the glory of God; they have all deemed the mission, which is even God's mission, to be worthy of their full-fledged commitment.

Love motivates the party to risk their lives over and over again. It is not just Jonathan's love for Mina but all the men's pure love for Mina that spurs them on. For example, they all specifically and tearfully swear loyalty to her to do all they can to keep her from becoming a vampire (Stoker 327-330). Love is also what not only motivates them to keep fighting the Count, but it is *how* he is defeated. In contrast to the Count who exploits people but remains aloof, primarily working in isolation, the band kneel, all hold hands, and pledge themselves to be true to one another (Stoker 299). Each member of the band is valuable, and without each one, they could not have defeated the Count. Van Helsing, their leader, is the one who brings most of the tools and has the knowledge and faith all the other members need to fight the Count. He rallies them all and keeps them going via the example of his own devotion and his many eloquent and passionate speeches. Jonathan Harker is essential for his former

experience with the Count and firsthand knowledge. His profession also comes in handy because of all his connections and authority as a lawyer. This is how he can locate almost all the Count's boxes/hiding places.

Mina is essential because her sweetness and purity motivate the rest of the men to fight. She also is intelligent and diligent. Mina converts Dr. Seward's recordings to print and helps to assemble all the journals of the group. Additionally, she has ideas that reveal her internal commitment to goodness and her cleverness, such as her idea that Van Helsing hypnotizes her repeatedly once some of the Count's blood is in her so that she can disclose information about his whereabouts. Dr. Seward is valuable to the killing of Dracula because of how much of a support he is to Van Helsing. When Van Helsing has a mental breakdown (so it seems) after Lucy's death, John is the one at his side, listening and protecting. Renfield ends up being helpful in his own way, and he might not have been there without John and John's patience and courage. Arthur is valuable not only for his strength and intelligence but, like Jonathan, for his connections and the respect his father's name now his, Lord Godalming, evokes. His wealth helps to fund many of their tasks as they travel to Transylvania and work as fast as they can to capture the Count before sunset. Another valuable contribution was Arthur's forward thinking in bringing a whistle to call dogs to save them from all of Dracula's rats. Quincey Morris has a lot of prior adventuring and hunting experience, and he even encountered a vampire in the past. He and Jonathan are the two who kill Dracula in the end, though in the process, the precious Quincey loses his life.

In the end, due to the power of the cross, the strong character, skill, and knowledge of each vampire hunter, their unity and teamwork, and the hand of God (Stoker 352, 355, 356), Dracula is defeated. He turns to dust, and the scar on Mina's forehead disappears. She is no longer in danger of becoming a vampire. She is free from the greatest evil! But the victory indeed came at a high cost. Much stress, many near-death experiences, the loss of the valiant Quincey... It was a harrowing expedition for sure. But it was worth it because now Mina and all the world were safer, with one fewer vampire to be vexed about.

There is much the church can learn from Bram Stoker's *Dracula*. The Bible is clear evil spirits exist in our world, too, though not as revenants. These evil spirits are to be taken seriously. The Bible sounds the death penalty for all who experiment with dark magic and consult mediums (Lev. 20:27). The Bible also says Christians can be vexed by demons if they continue in habitual sin. For example, Ephesians 4:26-27 says, "Be angry and do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger and give no opportunity to the devil." We are secure in Jesus; it is true, but we must keep following Him! Pastor Jon Thompson, author of the book, *Deliverance*, says the devil is not behind every bush but likely, every third.

Amy woke up the next morning to birds singing right outside her window. Despite the rudeness of her alarm, jolting her out of her deep sleep, Amy stretched and sighed contentedly. She felt just like those birds. She felt free, and she knew, deep down, that she really was—free from the evil spirit that had been vexing her for months, even years. At that Pentecostal prayer meeting that she had attended that fateful evening, Amy had been prayed for by a group of Christians, and something had happened inside of her. One man had spoken a word of knowledge that went straight to the core of her being. Though he did not know her, he spoke a message that fit perfectly for her and the complex situation she had found herself in. Amy knew the Holy Spirit was the only one who could've told him such a message. This message affected her heart deeply, and she began to shake and weep—then vomit. It became evident that something had left her—it was affirmed in the group and in her own spirit that this was an evil spirit of fear. Amy walked away from this experience with greater insight into spiritual warfare and a deeper appreciation for the body of Christ. She knew she couldn't have been delivered from that evil force on her own. She needed the ministry of her Pentecostal brothers and sisters, even if it challenged her theological presuppositions.

Christians cannot do this Christian life alone. The description in Ephesians 6 of the different pieces of armor is not meant to be a picture of a lone Christian warrior but an army. The only way to be protected is to put all our shields up *together*. This is also the only way we successfully advance. As Christians, we are blessed to know the end of the story. Jesus wins—the good does win out in the end, but this will not be without a struggle. As Jesus Himself said, “the one who endures to the end will be saved” (Mt. 24:13). Through the power of the cross and sacrificial love, to a measure now and in the future, once the devil is finally thrown in the lake of fire, God's people will say as they recall their fighting days: “It was almost impossible to believe that the things which we had seen with our own eyes and heard with our own ears were living truths. Every trace of all that had been was blotted out” (Stoker 371). In light of the coming complete victory, we must resist temptation, stand firm on God's truth (Eph. 6:13), and refuse to be taken captive by Satan and any of his lies (2nd Cor. 10: 5, 2nd Tim. 2:26). As Charles Spurgeon eloquently and valiantly proclaimed and applied, “If sinners be damned, at least let them leap to Hell over our dead bodies” (Comfort). May true love compel us to take the battle seriously.

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