Batman v Superman v God

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There's a moment in the recently released Batman v Superman: Dawn of Justice, where the jittery, ADHD-villain Lex Luthor says, 'If God is all powerful, He cannot be all good. And if He is all good, He cannot be all powerful.' It's just one of many allusions or outright references to God in the movie, usually directed at Superman. 'And now God bends to my will,' Luthor claims at one point, while later adding his verdict: 'Now God is as good as dead.' Batman v Superman is grim, almost completely devoid of humour and contains more explosions than I have ever seen in my life. In fact, I think I would rather be wiped out in the fighting than be asked to help clean up the city afterwards. The movie also contains, as one of its running themes, the idea of fighting against, overthrowing and killing God. In modern blockbusters, it seems that direct references to God have become much more common. It used to be that some madman would hijack a nuclear warhead and aim it at New York (yawn!), but with the onset of galactic superhero sequels, prequels and prequels to sequels, those days are over. Today's movies are concerned with weightier matters – subjects with a deeper resonance in the public's minds. 2015's Avengers: Age of Ultron gave its villain, Ultron, some positively Biblical zingers, like his response to the question of what would happen if human beings didn't improve under his watch: 'Ask Noah,' he replied. When he got his hands on the metal alloy that would, yes, destroy earth, he said, 'Upon this rock I will build my church.' And then there was Vision, the character created to destroy him, who, when explaining who he was, simply stated, 'I am.' Sound familiar?

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In the upcoming X-Men: Apocalypse, the immortal, invincible planet-threatening villain is named Apocalypse, and he gladly explains to us that, 'I've been called many things over many lifetimes: Ra, Krishna, Yahweh...' In case we don't get the point, it's revealed to us that this ancient being has four followers, just like the four horsemen of the apocalypse. 'He got that one from the Bible,' says one character to another. 'Or the Bible got it from him,' is the reply. And this is just the movie trailer. The fact that big-budget storytelling should use the idea of gods is not surprising; it makes for good storylines. What's worth taking note of, though, is how much more blatantly biblical it's becoming. Of course, a story can be used to depict something true of God, as movies like the Chronicles of Narnia have done. But the current crop of superhero movies aren't interested in creating an elevated view of God; they're dragging the very notion of Him down to earth. Far from being avoided, the idea of God is thrown around casually, as if anyone can be God, and anyone else can kill God. I don't imagine that the people making these movies are Christians, and so I wouldn't expect them to have any kind of reverence for the God of Scripture. But think about the influence of the world around them. The ultimate fantasy of rebellious humanity is to bring God down – to neutralise Him and render Him harmless. And so we bring Him into our little fantasy stories; we make Him part of the plot and we speak about Him as if He were just another character. We put human faces on Him; we put alien faces on Him. We make Him good, bad, alive, dead, and we give Him other names. We put His eternal words in the mouths of made-up characters, people wearing costumes and prosthetics, and use those words to add solemnity to the scenes.

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And that's where Christians need to be on their guard. These flippant distortions of God are not always good for us to watch, and can even confuse the faith and feed the doubts of some. It might be permissible for us to watch these movies, but it's not always beneficial (1 Corinthians 6:12). I wouldn't necessarily instruct a believer to stay away from these movies, but I would encourage them to guard their heart and mind when watching them. My feeling is that it's going to get more and more blatant as the devil desperately tries to undermine who God is. Indeed, an upcoming Marvel movie, Doctor Strange, centers around a superhero who performs sorcery and mystical arts to protect the earth. We started with Batman v Superman, so let's end with it. In one scene, an angry victim of violence climbs a large statue of Superman and defaces it with red spraypaint. The two words he writes on it are large and bold: FALSE GOD. And that's exactly right.

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