

The Sect of Dexter

I have become intrigued by a new cultural phenomenon – the fascination with serial-killers. While serial killer groupies often fall into two main categories:

Those who collect memorabilia, and those who 'fall in love' with the killer, a new dimension has arisen – avid fans of an anti-hero serial killer who has raised the playing field to a philosophical level with questions about morality in a world of immoral practices. Dexter is Dexter Morgan, a Gen-Xer living in Florida. He is also a forensic expert in blood, specifically the analysis of blood spatter patterns which come about from violent acts. He works with the Miami Police Department, but has another 'job'. He kills serial killers.

Over a short series of articles, I will help explore the world of Dexter and the issues the series presents for today.

Dexter started in 2006 as a cable television show, and is now in its fourth series, and typically has now been picked up for free to air, once it gained a significant following in Australia. There are 12 episodes in each series. The series initially gained notoriety in Australia with an advertisement promoting the series featuring Dexter flying to Adelaide because it apparently has the highest serial killer count per capita. The advertisement was removed because the South Australian government filed a complaint.

Some of the themes in Dexter:

The sins of the parents are visited on the children.

Dexter's killing orientation arose from his background:

As a young child he witnessed the murder of his mother in a particularly brutal way, and was left in sea of blood. He is found after two days by his eventual adoptive father, Harry Morgan (a police officer), who recognises his violent urges and trains him from an early age to adapt and to channel his desires through a code for life and death. Now Dexter follows the code that Harry developed – to kill only those who murder without remorse, with these being primarily those who beat the justice system and walk free.

Dexter has a supportive relationship with his adoptive sister, and an initial mutually beneficial relationship with his girlfriend, single mother, Rita, but he is usually depicted as emotionally neutral. For Rita, Dexter provides a reliable and helpful man about the house, and for Dexter, she and the kids are good cover, following advice from his father - 'try to blend into normal life.' Over time the series reveals more about Dexter and how he was 'created'.

Justice is best delivered from outside the justice system.

The vigilante theme has a long history, and many famous actors have been involved with movies of this nature. The recent Jodie Foster movie, *The Brave One*, is an excellent example, as she hunts down and kills the

street thugs who murdered her fiancé and left her for dead in a New York park.

There have also been many infamous real life examples of people taking the law into their own hands, and probably most people have contemplated doing this at some stage when some crime has befallen their own family.

Killing can be morally justified

As the show often posits, "Is Dexter a good person doing evil things, or a bad person doing good things?"

Is killing always wrong? Is killing a murderer actually right?

Is the death penalty really a personal decision or it purely a clinical state decision?

Does the removal of evil people mean that innocent people are saved?

There are times in the show when the consideration of issues reveals elements similar to contemporary discussions about the concept of the 'just war'.

There is most likely no God

Dexter is a confronting series, but it is connecting with a new generation of probable mostly non-church attendees. Will it cause good moral reflection and possible ground for pre-evangelism? Interestingly, the religious elements are often overt, as there are church scenes and discussions and faith or lack of faith and belief in God and also the nature of evil. I wonder if people without some Christian knowledge would make sense of some scenes.

The most amazing example of religious reference occurs in 'Return to Sender' (Series 1/6). At one of the crime scenes, a huge junkyard which housed illegal immigrants who were often murdered if they did not have money to pay for their release, a young Cuban boy is found hiding in the trunk of a car. He is clearly traumatised, and takes time to be persuaded to help the police. There was a small hole in the trunk, and he was able to see the man that captured and took away the couple who had killed his family. A sketch artist works meticulously with him, and the viewer is caught up wondering, will this expose Dexter, and certainly Dexter questions as well. Finally the detectives in the unit have a look at the finished and classically drawn portrait; Jesus Christ is revealed as the man he saw that night.

Clearly the connection is Jesus as his 'saviour', but for those of us who have read the Sermon on the Mount, this is a type of saviour Jesus could never be.

Peter Bentley
Posted 6 July 2009
confessingcongregations.com