

There is a conflict in our culture that rages every year in December as we prepare for Christmas. It is a divisive issue that causes great debate. I'm going to try to be fair to both sides this morning, and to express their views. But I have to warn you, I will be coming down on one particular side.

The great divisive holiday question is this:

Is the classic 1988 action movie *Die Hard*, a Christmas movie or not?

Those who say *Die Hard* is not a Christmas movie make the following arguments.

The movie is set on Christmas Eve, but other movies like *Batman Returns* and *Lethal Weapon* are set at Christmas, and they're not Christmas movies.

Die Hard was released in July, not in November or December.

There's nothing that mentions anything about Christmas on the movie poster.

And the star of the movie, Bruce Willis himself, famously says "*Die Hard* is not a Christmas movie. It's a (-expletive-) Bruce Willis movie."

And the studio, 20th Century Fox originally said that it was not a Christmas movie. Interestingly, though the studio has changed that opinion as the years have gone on. Last year, for the 30th Anniversary in a somewhat tongue-in-cheek publicity statement, they said that not only IS *Die Hard* a Christmas movie, but it's also "the greatest Christmas story ever told."

Part of the reason for that switch is that many people DO view *Die Hard* as a Christmas movie. They point to the fact that the movie contains many Christmas songs at some pretty important junctures.

Plus it's worked into the dialogue.

The villain, Hans Gruber, played by the late, great Alan Rickman, says at one point, "It's Christmas, Theo. It's the time of miracles. So be of good cheer..."

And the hero, John McClane, played by Bruce Willis kills one of Hans Gruber's henchmen and sends his body with back to his boss wearing a Santa hat and carrying the message, "Now I have a machine gun. Ho ho ho."

Plus, *Die Hard* gets watched more in December than at any other time of the year. And it spikes in Google searches that month as well.

But my favorite argument comes from *Die Hard*'s screenwriter himself. The star, Bruce Willis may think that it's not a Christmas movie. But the screenwriter, Steven de Souza, says it is definitely a Christmas movie. And he has famously compiled a list comparing *Die Hard* to *White Christmas*. The premise of that list is that *Die Hard* refers to Christmas far more

than *White Christmas* does—so if *Die Hard* is not a Christmas movie, then *White Christmas* isn't a Christmas movie either.

I'm definitely of the "Yes, it is a Christmas movie" side. The Haneys watch *Die Hard* every December. Yes, it is a violent R-rated action movie. But also has a heartwarming family sub-plot like many other holiday movies.

New York police detective John McClane has gone to Los Angeles to try to patch things up with his estranged wife. Yes, he gets caught trying to foil a terrorist attack that turns out to be a high-tech robbery. But through the ordeal, John McClane and his wife realize the depth of their feelings for each other. They are reunited and re-commit to each other. Oh, and by the way, her name is Holly. That sounds like the perfect name of a key character in a Christmas movie.

There is a deeper underlying theme as well that screams Christmas to me. John McClane is not an invulnerable super-hero. He is a human being. He has his struggles. His pride has kept him in New York while his wife and family have moved to Los Angeles.

And as John McClane is fighting a battle to stop Hans Gruber, he is not doing it out of a position of strength.

Hans Gruber is one of the greatest movie villains of all time. He is a meticulous planner. And throughout the movie, Gruber usually has the upper hand, and McClane is on the defensive, trying just to survive.

And John McClane struggles and sweats. And in the movie he bleeds, and bleeds, and bleeds. He is not invulnerable in any way, shape or form.

In three-and-a-half weeks we will celebrate Christmas. The center of that celebration is the birth of God incarnate, God present in a human being. And Jesus is a real human being, in spite of also being God. Jesus will be born amongst poverty and the stench of the stable. He will live a real human life with real human struggles. And he will eventually die an agonizing and very bloody death.

Ultimately it is not Jesus' god-like powers that save us. It is his humility, his vulnerability, his willingness to sacrifice himself for us.

And this is something ultimately that does separate *Die Hard* from the Christmas story.

Yes, I believe *Die Hard* is a Christmas movie, but it is also an action movie.

And in our American action movies, problems are solved with violence. And it's not just our action movies. It's very a common American theme across movie genres to try to stop evil by force. Yes, it's in *Die Hard* and *Dirty Harry*. It's in *High Noon* and *True Grit*. It's in *Batman* and *Spiderman* and *Star Wars*. It's a very common American theme.

And don't get me wrong. When you're facing the evil of a villain like Hans Gruber who is willing to kill dozens of innocent people in order to steal money, it sometimes takes violent means to stop him. You sometimes have to meet force with force. In the movie *Die Hard*, the guns of Hans Gruber and his gang have to be stopped by the guns of NYPD detective John McClane and LAPD Sergeant Al Powell.

In our broken and fallen world, that's sometimes the best that we can do.

But during Advent, we look to a different possibility in a more perfect world. We look forward to the coming reign of the Prince of Peace. Yes, born in Bethlehem 2,025 Christmases ago. But also, the Prince of Peace who will return in power and great glory.

We look forward to the time when God's will is done on earth as it is in heaven.

We look forward to God's perfect kingdom where no sword must be drawn.

We look forward to the time we'll hear about next week in our Old Testament lesson when the wolf shall lie down with the lamb and the calf with the lion.¹

We look forward to the time we will hear about in our Old Testament lesson on Christmas Eve, when warriors' boots and their bloody uniforms can be burned up as fuel for the fire because they will no longer be necessary.² That's because of the coming of the Messiah, who will be called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace."³

We look forward to the time we hear about in our Old Testament lesson today when we can "beat (our) swords into plowshares, and (our) spears into pruning hooks; nation shall not lift up sword against nation, neither shall they learn war any more."⁴

For now, we live in a world that can often be dark and violent. There are tyrants and bullies and aggressors in our world. The wolves often prey on the lambs. And I'm thankful for those who defend others and protect the weak. I'm thankful for our peace officers and the members of our armed forces who defend us.

Perhaps, that's why I love the movie *Die Hard*.

But as a Christian I am also called to follow the Prince of Peace. He is the light who has come to enlighten the darkness of our world. And he calls us to shine his light and share his love in the midst of the darkness around us.

At the end of our Old Testament lesson, after talking about beating swords into ploughshares and spears into pruning hooks, the prophet Isaiah adds an exhortation.

¹ Isaiah 11:6

² Isaiah 9:5

³ Isaiah 9:6

⁴ Isaiah 2:4

He says,
"O house of Jacob, come, let us walk in the light of the LORD!"

It is a dark world. Can we walk in God's light? Can we shine just a little more of God's light in the midst of the darkness?

There is estrangement and there are broken relationships around us. Can we look for ways to bring just a little more healing?

There is plenty of despair. Can we offer just a little more hope?

There are deep divisions in our culture. Can we reach across those divides, even just a little bit?

One day, God's kingdom will come, and his will will be done on earth as it is in heaven. One day we will experience the full perfection that God's kingdom will bring, perfect love, perfect peace.

But for now, let us look for even the tiniest ways to share God's love and peace, even just a little bit.

Let us walk in the light of the Lord. Even if they're just the tiniest baby steps, let us walk in the light of the Lord.