

Bibles and Brains: Reading Scripture in the Zombie Apocalypse presented by Kelly J. Murphy 10/25/16

Dr. Karen: Well, good evening, everybody and welcome. My name is Dr. Karen Eifler and, together with Father Charlie Gordon, we direct the Garaventa Center for Catholic Intellectual Life and American Culture here at the university and we couldn't be happier that you came out. For the last several years, we have had a film series that we called Bringing Eyes of Faith to Film and usually the week before Halloween we like to show a zombie movie and then I found who is the world's leading authority on zombies and movies about that would be super cool. That's what you're here for tonight.

A couple of announcements before I introduce our speaker. If you are a first-time listener from the community and you would like to know more about the Garaventa Center and the events that we sponsor, because we sponsor concerts and talks and films and workshops and conversations, we have our calendars over there at the table and we have fliers for some of our upcoming events. We also have a sign-up sheet there if you'd like to be part of our electronic mailing list, which keeps you up to date on all the fast-breaking events that are happening at the Garaventa Center, as well as weekly podcast reflections by Fr. Gordon on the Sunday reading, so if you want to know more and want to be part of that sign-ups are over there after the talk.

If you are a student who is here as part of a class, or are hoping to get something out of it for a class, our sign-ups or sign-ins for that are going to be on the table outside the door after Dr. Murphy's talk, all right? Is that it, Father Gordon?

Fr. Charlie: Any PDUs?

Dr. Karen: If you are a teacher in K-12 schools anywhere, we have ways to be able to present you with straight professional development units for you to use also with the sign-up over here on the table. Either you sign up with your email or mail and we'll mail that to you tomorrow at no cost because we have a special arrangement with our school of education.

Every now and then, I hear somebody say I'm bored and I always wonder how could somebody be bored when there are so many cool things to wonder about in the world. Just crazy stuff going on in the world. How in the world could you be bored? It brings me extra thrill when I read the resume of someone like Dr. Kelly Murphy, who we're going to hear from tonight, because you can tell by looking at her, not only does she not have an unclaimed moment in her life, she's very busy, but she is interested in so many things. She is a professor of religious studies and philosophy at Central Michigan University and she has published on zombies in film. She has published on Biblical prophets. She has published on images of masculinity in Scripture and social justice in Scriptures. Connecting with zombies. She's able to make amazing connections among topics that would never even occur

to me were kissing cousins and Dr. Murphy makes those connections.

She arrived at Central Michigan University by way of a doctorate at Emory and also graduate studies in Oxford and she was charged with filling classes out of a really large university where nobody was taking classes in Biblical studies and they said you've got to fill those classes. What do you got? She said, "Well, I'd like to teach a class on zombies and the Apocalypse." They said, "Well, you can try it but no one will ever come to something about zombies." The classes are standing room only. They've been written about. The Washington Post did a story that got released all over the country and that's how she came to our attention and we knew that we just had to get her to come to speak for the Garaventa Center so let's get to Bibles and Brains - Reading Scripture in the Zombie Apocalypse, as we welcome Dr. Kelly Murphy.

Dr. Kelly:

Can you hear me? Does this sound like the microphone is on? Yes? All right. Thank you so much for having me. Thank you to the Garaventa Center, to Dr. Eifler, to Fr. Gordon. I have been so pleased to be here at the University of Portland. It is absolutely beautiful and amazing but you know that, and I'm really excited to talk to you about two of my favorite things tonight: the Bible and zombies and brains.

The most important thing that I'm going to say tonight is on the screen. There are no zombies in the Bible, so there are no zombies in the Bible. The reason why this is important is because after I taught my class at Central University, I got a lot of emails from people who wanted to let me know that there are no zombies in the Bible. I know that but they wanted me to know that too, and so I just want to establish that from the very beginning. There are no zombies in the Bible.

Sure, in the Book of Ezekiel, Ezekiel raises up dry bones, and Jesus revives his friend Lazarus from the dead, and, perhaps most interestingly, in the Book of Matthew, we had this: And the graves were opened and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised, and coming out of the graves after Jesus' resurrection, they went into the holy city and appeared to many. None of these things are zombies because there are no zombies in the Bible. Thank you. All right. If you don't get anything else out of tonight, that should be like the thing that you get.

There are no zombies in the Bible but I ended up teaching this class in Central Michigan University on zombies and the Bible. It's called From Revelation, From the Book of Revelation to the Walking Dead: Apocalypse Then and Now. We traced the evolution of Apocalypse in text all the way from the Book of Revelation and before it to the Walking Dead and beyond. These are my students at Central. They were not that dressed like zombies. This is the wonders of computer programming but they did pose for this picture and they were very proud of it.

When I got to Central, they asked me to think of new classes to teach and, at the time, I was reading a lot of stuff about the end of the world and I think that the end of the world, stories about end of the world, are especially poignant. They ask really big, important questions and they made me think of the Bible and the stories

in the Bible that are about what might happen at the end, and so I thought, "What would happen if we put these together?" And started to think about these together.

One of the clips from the Walking Dead that I want to start with is what set me off on this a little bit. This is from season 2 and it is when Hershel and Rick has managed to escape from Hershel's farm and they're standing on the highway and they're waiting for the rest of the people to come and meet them, and, if you don't know anything else about the show, they're standing on a highway, which is littered with zombies, and they're waiting for the rest of their friends and family to come and meet them.

Carl: Where's Mom? You said she'd be here. We've got to go back for her. No.

Dr. Kelly: For Walking Dead fans, this is of course an instance where Lori doesn't know where Carl is.

Carl: What are you doing? It is Mom. We need to get to her. [inaudible 00:08:26] mile away.

Rick: Quiet, all right?

Carl: It's Mom.

Rick: Stop.

Hershel: Rick, you have to get your boy to safety. I'll wait here for my girls and the others. I know a few places. We'll meet up with [inaudible 00:09:07].

Rick: We're safe. We're not splitting up.

Hershel: Please. Keep your boy safe. I'll add one of the cars [inaudible 00:09:21] gets me something to hit. I've lost my father, I've lost my wife, maybe my daughters.

Rick: You don't know that. They'll be here.

Hershel: You don't know that.

Rick: You're a man of God. Have some faith!

Hershel: I can't confess to understand God's plan. Christ promised a resurrection of the dead. I just thought He had something a little different in mind.

Dr. Kelly: Now, some of you giggled but it's a serious question. The disconnect between what we might expect that might happen is in the world but we might believe in the things that happen around us. That got me thinking. How can we put ancient text into conversation with contemporary texts about the end of the world, which very

rarely mention God or the divine? The Walking Dead very rarely stops to think about the world of God or the worlds of the divine, so because I'm at a Catholic University, I feel compelled to start with a confession. I actually do not like zombies. I find them to be creepy and gory and kind of horrible and the stories are often far too violent for me.

About half of the things I am going to talk about tonight I've only watched about half of because I spend most zombie films and zombie television shows like this or like this, but I keep watching. Why do I keep watching? Because I think the questions that these stories are asking are incredible important. Stories about the end of the world make us ask questions like why humans always told stories about the end? Humans have always thought about what it might be like at the end of the world. That's interesting.

These kinds of stories also raise the best thing about what kinds of anxieties and dreads these stories tap into. They make us think about what it means to be human, what it means to be good, and what it means to be evil. They make us ask where we're going. Not just today or tomorrow or according to whatever your five-year-plan is, but where's history going? What is humanity doing here, and what is our place in that larger narrative arc? Then what if the world were to fall apart? How would you behave? More importantly, how would I behave? These are big, important questions.

I'd like to frame tonight's conversation around one of my favorite quotes about zombies by a guy named James Lowder who wrote Triumph of the Walking Dead, and the quotation is this: All zombie stories are created equal. I'm sorry. All zombies are created equal. All zombie stories are not. The best ones, like the Walking Dead, get into your head and make you think, make you fatten up the grey matter that the living dead lust after so ravenously. I want to frame our conversation around four grey matter-fattening facts, when we combine thinking about the end of the world in zombie narratives and ancient apocalyptic texts.

The first one is What's an Apocalypse Anyway? The second is Monsters Revealed. The third one is Zombies as End Prophet, also known as When Zombies Started to Eat Brains. The fourth one is For Hope and Humanity. All right, so our first one. To begin this, we have to watch a short clip from a movie that I think you all watched last year, Warm Bodies, and it's the beginning of Warm Bodies and I'll tell you more in a minute.

R: I'm so pale. I should get out more. I should eat better. My posture is terrible. I should stand up straight. People would respect me more if I stand up straight. I just want to connect. Why can't I connect with people. Oh, right. It's because I'm dead. I shouldn't be so hard on myself. I mean, we're all dead. This girl's dead, that guy's dead, that guy in the corner is definitely dead. Jesus, these guys look awful.

I wish I can introduce myself but I don't remember my name. I mean, I think it started with an R but that's all I have left. I can't remember my name or my parents

or my job, although my hoodie would suggest I was unemployed. All right, sometimes I look at the [others 00:14:04] and try to imagine what they were. You were a janitor. You were the rich son of a corporate CEO. You were ... a personal trainer. Now you're a corpse. I have a hard time piecing together how this whole apocalypse thing happened. [crosstalk 00:14:37] chemical warfare or an airborne virus or a radioactive outbreak [monkey 00:14:38], but it doesn't really matter. This is who we are now.

This is a typical day for me. I just [float 00:14:48] around, occasionally bumping into people, unable apologize or say much of anything. It must have been so much better before, when everyone could express themselves and communicate their feelings and just enjoy each other's company.

Dr. Kelly:

All right, so you watch this and probably a couple of different things happen, but one of the good things that you might have thought is, "This is breaking all the rules about zombies. Zombies don't wander around, thinking and wondering about the world in which they live." I want to come back to that in a second. The other thing that I want to point out is that R sort of casually muses that he's had a hard time piecing together this whole apocalypse thing, and we all go, "Sure, right. Apocalypse. End of the world, end of society as we know it, everything is different, it's not the same."

Our popular culture loves the apocalypse. It is almost everywhere. Our favorite apocalypse is the zombie apocalypse and we have certain expectations about the zombie apocalypse. There will be zombies, they will be no longer alive, they're somehow undead but they can still move around, they eat brains or flesh, maybe. They're contagious, especially through their bites, they have no recollection of their human self, and, if you want to kill them, you go for the head, right? I mean, we all know this.

We hear about the apocalypse in a lot of other places too. If you've ever read Margaret [Adams Mad Alan 00:16:18] series, if you've watched Interstellar, if you've turned on just about any television show, there are all these references to the end of the world. How things are going to end. Everything is going to be different. Is it in our politics? All the time. As recently as 2015, representative Michele Bachmann said that the apocalypse was going to happen, the rapture was going to happen. It was because of Obama's thinking about marriage and the marriage equality act and also because of his policies on Iran. That was going to bring about the end times. It's everywhere we look.

Now, that's really interesting but the most interesting thing: even the Pentagon has a zombie apocalypse plan. It's tongue-in-cheek. They use it for training, but it's everywhere, right? The zombie apocalypse is everywhere, but what's really interesting is that, while we use this term apocalypse pretty regularly, in its ancient context, it meant something totally different. Many of you have probably heard of the Book of Revelations, yes? Or maybe the Book of Daniel from the Old Testament. Chapter 7 through 12 in the Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation,

the last book of the New Testament, are both considered apocalypses in terms of genre.

You read Harry Potter, you're reading fiction. If you pick up a history of the United States, you are reading history, right? Different genres. Well, there's a genre or literature called the apocalypse, which was incredibly popular from around the year 250 BCE, until the year 200 CE. We only ended up with the Book of Daniel chapter 7 through 12 in our Bible and the Book of Revelation at the end of the New Testament but there were a ton of apocalypses written during this time period, including the Book of Watchers, First Enoch, Apocalypse [inaudible 00:18:08], Testament of Abraham, Third Baruch, Four [Elder 00:18:09], Second Baruch, [inaudible 00:18:14], Revelations. Some of these you might recognize if you're using a Catholic Bible.

These don't make it into the canonical Bibles that we have today but early Jews and Christians used and read these books quite frequently and we get the word apocalypse that we use all the time to talk about the end of the world, the end of society, that zombies who are going to come and munch on our brains, right? We use this word all the time but it actually means something quite different than end of the world.

The Book of Revelation begins, the Revelation, the Apokalypsis of Jesus Christ which God gave him to show his servants what must soon take place. He made it known by sending his angel to his servant John. In other words, the Greek word apokalypsis from which we get our word apocalypse and we use it as end of the world, as per the Greek word, that means to uncover or to reveal. It has nothing to do necessarily with the end of the world. Some of these books imagine the end of the world but they don't all imagine the end of the world.

The way you can think about this is if you think about a marriage ceremony, and this was true in the Greek world too. A bride walks down the aisle typically and she gets to the end of the aisle and then the groom does, what? Lifts off the veil and it uncovers her or reveals her for the first time to her husband and to whoever else is in the audience. What was hidden is now visible. Apocalypses were written by people like John of Patmos to uncover or to reveal something about the world that you couldn't just see unless a prophet of God told you about them. They were written to uncover or reveal certain secrets. Sometimes about the end of the world, sometimes just about how life was. A revelation. An uncovering.

We've got this word that we use in a really different way today than how it was used in the ancient world, and that's our grey matter moment number 1: apocalypse hasn't always meant end of the world. Apocalypse originally meant to uncover or to reveal. Something hidden. Something secret. Something that was not clearly visible to everyone.

That takes us to grey matter moment number 2, which is that monsters reveal. At first glance, you may not think that there's anything particularly revealing about

zombies. They're all over the place, they're in our pop culture stories. What could be so special or interesting about these monsters? The word monster comes from a Latin word which actually means to show or to reveal, and there's a verb which is also related to the Latin monstrum is related to the Latin monere and that means to warn. Essentially, monsters are revelations or warnings, if we translate it literally.

Now, apocalypses reveal and monsters reveal too, if we study them and explore them and think about them. Obviously, the zombie apocalypse is filled with zombies, but there are no zombies in the Bible. Good. You sold me, but our Scriptures brim with monsters too. There are beasts in the Book of Daniel. Daniel 7 has a beast that comes out of the ocean and it has a horn and the horn is filled with human eyes. It's creepy, yes. There's also Leviathan or Behemoth in the Book of Psalms, amongst other places. There's the dragon in the Book of Revelation. What might zombies and Biblical monsters reveal to us if we study them and think about them more closely?

Now, unlike a lot of the monsters that have come into western imagination, zombies are not from the western world. Vampires? Western. Werewolves? Western. Zombies come to us from West Africa through Haiti. West Africans were Haiti ... Sorry. West Africans were taken out of West Africa and forced into slavery in Haiti by the French and then later they were also oppressed by US colonial rule in Haiti. In Haiti, there was this idea that, if someone transgressed a norm and the evil sorcerer would come and take that person and they would make that person into a zombi, without an e. Z-O-M-B-I.

They would force that person to do their will or their bidding. That person would have no self-control. No ability to not do the work that the master was trying to make them do, but in no point did these zombies eat brains. They were merely these sort of automatons that were controlled by a master. Sometimes these were living beings and sometimes these were people that had been brought of their graves and forced to work in the sugar mills. This is the idea behind the sort of folklore of the Haitian zombi, but no brains. There's no brain-eating. Now that's interesting because we have a zombie that does nothing but eat flesh and brains, and so how did we get from the Haitian concept of the zombie to the American concept of the zombie where zombies eat brains?

First of all, imagine this: you are in Haiti, you have been forced into slavery and you essentially have no control over your own life. When you start to imagine what might be scary, what might be terrifying, there's nothing more terrifying than being enslaved to the point where, not only do you not have control of your life, but you don't even have any control over your brain. You're no longer you. You've become disembodied, in some sense. Your soul is not part of your body and your body just does whatever the master wants it to do. This fear, according to most zombie scholars, makes a lot of sense, because you've got people who are already enslaved who are afraid of being enslaved, and so this monster makes sense if you think about the context in which this is happening.

Then we've got the Americans and the Americans come to Haiti and they colonize it and they learned about this mysterious voodooan zombie figure and they get worried because it's a scary monster that they've never heard of before, and so we get our first, one of our first, movies about zombies. It's called White Zombie. It is a terrible, terrible movie and I'm going to show you a clip from it. This is White Zombie, 1932. Stay with me, right, for a minute.

Speaker 8: These are [inaudible 00:25:37].

Dr. Kelly: That's the evil sorcerer. That's why you know he's evil, and that's the white American lady that he calls [inaudible 00:26:01], right?

Speaker 8: [crosstalk 00:26:06]

Dr. Kelly: That's her fiance, in the carriage.

Speaker 9: [inaudible 00:26:20]

Dr. Kelly: That's also how you know he's evil, right? Those are the zombies. They don't want to eat brains. They just have to do the work that they're being forced to do.

Speaker 8: Why did you [inaudible 00:27:07]. We might have been killed.

Speaker 10: [inaudible 00:27:14]

Speaker 8: By who?

Speaker 10: They are not merely dead. They are the [embodied 00:27:23].

Speaker 8: They?

Speaker 10: Them. Zombies. The living dead. [Also 00:27:28] taken from the grave, [only 00:27:32] to work in the sugar mill [inaudible 00:27:35].

Dr. Kelly: All right, so, for Haitians, the fear was really not of zombies ... Sorry. The fear was not becoming a zombie. You weren't scared of zombies eating your brains or zombies coming to get you. What you were scared of is becoming a zombie. I just said that wrong twice, right? They're not afraid of the zombies getting them. The Haitians are afraid of being turned into zombies, but now we get this movie made by American film makers in 1932, where the fear is that some person in Haiti is going to make a nice, white American lady into a zombie. Yes, exactly, right?

The zombie starts to change. It's not something that happens to the Haitians. It's something that could possibly happen to Americans too, and if you read that and think about that in the context in which this movie is made in 1930s America, this is when imperialism happening, colonialism is happening. America is starting to lose

some of its power abroad, and some people, especially white American men, are starting to worry that maybe they're not as strong and powerful as they think they are. They're losing power nationally and abroad, and so you can see the zombies starts to change. Zombies have always been breaking the rules, constantly, and it becomes an American monster, in some ways, but they still don't eat brains.

This takes us to the Book of Revelation, which also has monsters. This is one of the most famous monsters from the Book of Revelation, mostly because of the number 666. A giant beast rises out of the earth. It's got two horns like a lamb and it speaks like a dragon. It's seized the inhabitants of the earth, telling them to make an image with the beast that have been wounded by the sword and yet lived, and it was allowed to give breath to the image of the beast so that the image of the beast could even speak and cause those who would not worship the image of the beast to be killed.

Also, it causes all, both small and great, both rich and poor, both free and slaved, to be marked on the right hand or the forehead so that no one can buy or sell who does not have that mark. That is the name of the beast or the number of its name. This calls for wisdom. Let any one with understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a person. It's number is 666.

Now, this is fascinating. Essentially, this is what just happened, if it wasn't totally clear. Revelations is a little bit confusing. There's a beast. He comes out of the ground, yes? He marks everyone with a number either on their forehead or on their hands, and then you can only buy things or sell things if you have the mark, yes? This is from the Brick Testament, which is a lovely resource online.

All right, so 666. The number of the beast. Raise your hand if you've heard the number of the beast. All right. One of the most famous people who's been identified as the number of the beast or as the beast was Ronald Wilson Reagan, because Ronald Wilson Reagan had 3 names that each had 6 letters. He was clearly the beast, yes? Other people include Pope Benedict the XI, Saddam Hussein, Barack Obama, and the more recent Pope Benedict. There have been a lot of beasts throughout history, if you listened to the people who tried to decide who was the beast.

Now, others have decided that it's not actually a person. It is a thing. The social security administration, or it's credit card chips. That's the mark of the beast. Or one of my personal favorites is the Monster energy drink. If you don't know what I'm talking about, google it on YouTube.

These have all been identified by people who read the Book of Revelation as signs of the end time. "Ronald Wilson Reagan has 3 names and they each have 6 letters in it? Oh, my God. The world is about to end." Clearly, right? Only, what didn't happen after Ronald Wilson Reagan was the president of the United States? The world did not in fact end. We know because we're here tonight, yes?

One of the interesting things about this passage about monsters is that we can read it in the same way that we think about zombies. If zombies reflect their context, *Warm Bodies* is about the 2000s, when people walk around on their phones and don't notice what they're doing and they don't pay any attention to anyone else and they run into a wall, right? That's one of the concerns of the late 2000s. The Book of Revelation is a beautiful, complex, amazing book. It's inspiring in many ways, but it's also been used to try to predict the end of the world.

Harold Camping tried to predict the end of the world multiple times. He said it was going to end on May 21, 2011. The world didn't end, but people had emptied their bank accounts, they left their families, they've gone around the United States, proclaiming that the world is about to end and then it didn't. He based his predictions on books from the Bible, so a couple of Bible nerd facts about the Book of Revelations to help us think about reading it in context.

It was written sometime around the year ... Sorry, 100 BC, give or take. This is a debatable issue, and it's at the height of Rome's empire in the Asia Minor, and certain groups of early Christians, to whom John of Patmos, the author of the Book of Revelation is writing, are feeling very oppressed by the Romans. They feel like they can't worship God in a way that they're intended to worship God. One of the most famous of the oppressive emperors was a guy named Nero. Nero Caesar. Now, there was a practice in Hebrew, and later in Greek, to take every letter of the alphabet and assign it a number. Numerology.

In this case, if you write Nero Caesar in Hebrew, you get that. What's on the board. If you translate each of those letters is that the numbers that correspond with them, you get 50 + 200 + 6 + 50 + 100 + 60 + 200, which gives you 666. In the ancient world, there is this practice of putting a mark on coins and the mark would be the picture of the emperor. People have spent lots of pages, lots of ink, trying to identify who the beast is, who 666 is, but the text tells us, if we read it in its context, it's warning about Nero. It's a coded reference to the Emperor Nero who is a horrible, horrible emperor to the early Christians, and it's saying, "Don't be associated with the Romans who are using the money and participating in sort of Roman economics and doing evil Roman things like thinking their emperors are the son of god, when we're Christians who know that the only Son of God is Jesus. We can read these texts and see how the context can help us interpret the monsters. Monsters revealed to us all kinds of things about the authors who write them, the authors who imagined them, and what they're worried about. What their fears are.

This takes us then to our third grey matter moment, which is this: zombies begin eating flesh and they start to judge you and me. Or zombies as [profits and 00:35:33] prophets. The original Greek word for profit means an interpreter or a foreteller of the divine realm. Prophets are in the Hebrew Bible, you should think of the Lorax. Have you ever read the Lorax? He goes around, saying like, "If you don't stop cutting down the trees and making the seeds, like bad things are going to happen?" He's addressing his context. If you don't stop this horrible behavior, bad things are going to happen.

The prophet Ezekiel, the prophet Jeremiah, the prophet Isaiah. They're all doing the same thing. "Hey, if you don't stop worshiping other gods, God's going to be really mad. You should really stop worshiping other gods." Or, "Hey, if you don't stop letting your wives make cakes for the queen of heaven, bad things are going to happen. Stop doing that." Or, "If you don't start taking care of [before 00:36:23], bad things are going to happen." When we look at Revelation 13 again, we see the same thing. "Don't participate in these Roman economic practices. Don't be associated with 666," and the Book of Revelations in its larger context basically says this. "Don't do the things the Romans are doing. Be Christians. Be true and faithful to God." When we get to zombies again, we get here. At some point, zombies start to bite people, and this is one of my favorite zombie haikus:

After I was bit

I knew I was in trouble

when I bit me too.

How do we get biting zombies? The answer to that is this movie Night of the Living Dead. It is one of the most interesting movies about zombies. I won't show you the whole clip because it's quite long but a young woman and her brother are in the graveyard visiting one of their parents' graves, and the brother is kind of a jerk. He's not being particularly nice. Then we get our first zombie who eats flesh. This is a moment in zombie history that's very important.

Johnny: Hey, I've [inaudible 00:37:52].

Barbra: I haven't seen you in church lately.

Johnny: Well, I'm not sure [inaudible 00:38:00] going to church. Do you remember one time when we were small, we were out here and it was from right over there. I jumped out at you from behind the tree and Grandpa got all excited and he shook his fist at me and he said, "Boy, [inaudible 00:38:12] into hell." Remember that? Right over there. You should really be scared.

Barbra: Johnny.

Johnny: You're still afraid.

Barbra: Stop it now, I mean it.

Johnny: That [inaudible 00:38:29] get you, Barbra.

Barbra: Stop it. You're ignorant.

Johnny: They're coming for you, Barbra.

Barbra: Stop it. You're acting like a child.

Johnny: They're coming for you. Look, there goes one of them now.

Barbra: She'll hear you.

Johnny: Here it comes now. I'm getting out.

Barbra: Johnny. No, Johnny! Help!

Dr. Kelly: Things don't end well for Johnny. Just so you know. That is our first flesh-eating zombie. Zombies are always breaking the rules. George Romero takes the Haitian notion of a person who is enslaved and have no mind of its own and combines it with a monster called the ghoul. When he does that, you get zombies that eat flesh and then, in later movies, brains. Zombies are always breaking the rules.

Now, one of the most interesting things about this is that this movie is about the woman that we saw who runs off after her brother gets attacked, she finds her way to the farmhouse, and in the farmhouse there is a man and his name is Ben. Ben is a wonderful, wonderful man. He also happens to be an African-American man in 1968. Yes, in a movie. In a house full of white people. Over the course of the night, every person in the house dies. They all get eaten by the zombies. Ben is the only one who survives.

At the end of the movie, this group of men who are white, who are all carrying guns, who have jobs, come and Ben is in the window, and it's very unclear. Do they know that it's a man or do they think that it's a living dead person? They don't actually use the word zombie in this movie. We don't know, but they shoot Ben before they find out, so the only survivor who also happens to be an African-American male is shot at the end of the movie, and then they take Ben's body and they put his body on the same pile of bodies that they put all of the other living dead bodies on. 1968.

When Romero made this movie, people said things like what [inaudible 00:40:50] says here: Romero seems to go out of his way to surround the posse with the imagery that makes it nearly impossible to overlook their similarity to the American lynch mob. A crowd of exclusively white men, only loosely governed by governmental authorities who have guns and working jobs, killing everything in their path. It is hard to watch the Night of the Living Dead without seeing social commentary. Without seeing Romero saying, either on purpose or not, "Hey, American racism is bad, and we need to fix our ways. If we don't fix our ways now, then something bad is going to happen," much in the same way as John of Patmos said, "If you don't stop participating in the Roman imperial system, bad things are going to happen. We're supposed to be faithfuls of God."

It's this social critique of what's happening, and so that is our third grey matter

moment, which is that reading zombie apocalypses and ancient apocalypses together, we see the way that these stories function to critique society and to say we need to step it up. We need to do better. We can be better.

That takes us to our very last grey matter moment. This is the back of the cover of the Walking Dead comics, and it's probably hard for you to see this, but Horror, Humanity, and Hope. It says this: in a world ruled by the dead, we are forced to finally start living. What does that mean? What does it mean to finally start living in a world ruled by the dead? This is one of the places where I think zombie stories and apocalyptic stories do really interesting things, where they make you start to say, "What does it mean to be human? What does it mean to be good? What does it mean to really live?"

I was going to show this scene, and we'll just watch the beginning of it because I think it'll help. Shaun is about to go down to the shop, yes?

Speaker 13: [crosstalk 00:44:12]

Dr. Kelly: If you've seen the movie, you know that that man had a dog yesterday, right? He's walking his dog, instead there's no dog. What does it mean to be alive? What does it mean to really start living? Zombies reflect our worries about what [inaudible 00:45:14] body, that bodies decay and die. These things reflect our propensity towards violence and what that might mean.

The mindless shuffling of the zombie horde can offer a critique of consumerism or of our mindless engagement with technology or just of not paying attention to the world around us. Maybe imagining a monster that looks so much like us but without our goals or our thoughts reflects our inherent awareness of how bad things might really be. Wars, terrorism, fear of others, environmental disaster.

Our ancient apocalyptic texts are often filled with violence and despair, so much so that the Book of Revelation was a controversial addition to the New Testament. Many people did not want to add the Book of Revelation to the New Testament. In popular culture, books like Revelation are often only invoked to predict the end of the world, as though the text is a map for when and how that will happen. Remember Ronald Wilson Reagan, but it's often overlooked that the apocalyptic texts like the Book of Daniel and the Book of Revelation are also filled with hope. Daniel includes a promise of salvation. You shall rise from where you were born at the end of days. Daniel 12:13.

So too in Revelation. With all of its raging beasts and dragons, says that, at the end of the book, residents will live peacefully in the holy city. The new city that God has created, which will have streets of gold and the radiance of rare jewels. There will be a new, better world. At the end of the day, no matter how desolate or terrifying the ancient apocalypses might seem at first, they're ultimately meant to be read as helpful and cathartic for their intended audiences. Remember, the audience of the Book of Revelation fears being persecuted by the Romans, and John sends this

letter out that says, "Yeah, things are bad, but the beast and the dragon? They're going to get it at the hands of God. You, if you're faithful, are going to have good things happen to you."

To conclude, some of these stories tell us about hope and horror and humanity and so do ancient apocalyptic texts. If you go here, we have this. This is one of the famous things from the Book of Revelation. The four horsemen who come forward and they've got swords and robes dipped in blood and it's very violent, but again, at the end of the story, there's something new. Something beautiful. This is also true in zombie stories.

You think of the Walking Dead and this conversation that Rick has with one of his friends Morgan over a Walkie Talkie when he doesn't even know whether Morgan can hear him, and he says: we're facing a long, hard journey. That's what lies ahead, and I'm trying hard not to lose faith. I can't, because if I do, the others, my family, my wife, my son. There's just a few of us now, so we've got to stick together. At the end of the day, hope keeps people going in the zombie apocalypse and it's also the thing that books like Revelation to be written and given to their communities. Hope.

It might seem like there's not much in common with these ancient texts and these contemporary texts, but we've got, at the end of the day, this promise that things will get better and that, even then, with all of the bleak despair and all of the examination of human nature and relationships that run like a thread through these stories, and their similarity. There's something that's similar in the way that ancient humans thought about the world and the way that contemporary humans think about the world. There's a similar question that's being asked about all of these things.

There's also the significant tension because, in books like Daniel and Revelation, this world is repeatedly portrayed as hopeless and awful and bleak and controlled by the powers of evil. After all, they proclaim time and time again, you only have to look around to see that that's what's happening. Everything is bleak and terrible, but there's this counterintuitive promise that the text holds for their audiences. Despite how the world seems, God, and not humans in the ancient texts, are ultimately in control of history.

In things like the Walking Dead, or even the bleak outlook of Romero and his films, what we have isn't a hope in the divine but a hope in humanity. That humanity can rally. That humanity can be better. That humanity can take care of one another. In the end, the stories that we tell about beasts from the land or humans turned zombies are good to think with and they give us insight on what it might mean to have hope in each other and / or in God. Thank you.

Dr. Karen: Thank you. Dr. Murphy said she'd be happy to take a handful of questions. If you've got some that you would like to address, as long as it takes maybe up to 10 minutes.

Dr. Kelly: Yes. You had your hand up a long time ago.

Speaker 14: Basically, the Revelations says the number 666, but what about the [inaudible 00:51:01] in the Bible? [inaudible 00:51:04] in the sixth book? What do you think? Do we just have to ignore that [inaudible 00:51:08]?

Dr. Kelly: That's really good. It's a really interesting question because the number 7 in Biblical thought is perfect and holy and wonderful, and so the number 6 is essentially anything that's less than that, and so we can sort of think about that and the way they thought about numbers in terms of the number 6 was less than perfect. It was less than good, so it was no accident that 666 ends up being a bad number.

Speaker 15: Not to mention [inaudible 00:51:40].

Dr. Kelly: Yeah, except that was very good, right? Good point. Any other questions? I know it's late. Yes?

Speaker 16: Do you think there's a new way [inaudible 00:52:01].

Dr. Kelly: Yeah, absolutely. The question was is there any way to predict the end of the world? My response would be two-fold. The short response is no. Yes, no, you can't. The reason I would say no is that people have been trying for a really long time and they just keep getting it wrong. In some ways, the Book of Revelation is itself a failed a prediction of the end of the world because John of Patmos really thought that there would be divine intervention in his lifetime. Soon, soon, soon. He probably really meant soon and not like 2,000 years later, right?

The other thing that people often point to is the passage where Jesus says that not even the Son of God knows when the end of the world would come. I think, if we're going to give someone the last word, it seems like Jesus might be the right one. Other thoughts and questions? Yes?

Speaker 17: What do you think you're looking at the horrible thing that happens that is happening in the world but many different [inaudible 00:53:12] in what comes after that. I'm interested especially looking at the horror stories and monstrosities that seem to be so much about chaos and really there is nothing left after [inaudible 00:53:27], so what about that create stuff after the end?

Dr. Kelly: In zombie apocalypses or in ...

Speaker 17: Sure. Comparing the two, I'm just interested ...

Dr. Kelly: Yeah. That's where they go in really different roads, right? Because clearly the Book of Revelation and even the Book of Daniel and we could go into even other ancient texts, have a vision of what's going to happen. That's that God creates a new and beautiful world here to replace the world that we have, which is not so great.

That's really clear at the end of Revelation, at the end of other ancient texts.

What we see in contemporary stuff is usually not quite as hopeful as that and I won't spoil anything but you know that, because we're in the seventh season of the Walking Dead and they're still sort of miserable and there's not been a new, good, wonderful thing. You do get other zombie narratives though where there is a sort of hopeful ending. You think Warm Bodies. I don't know how many of you have seen it and I don't want to spoil it but there is a sort of hopeful "Yay!" ending in Warm Bodies that's more than I think to Revelation than perhaps some others. I think it depends on what contemporary apocalypse you're talking about, so maybe that's about the authors. More about the authors than anything else.

Speaker 17: I was thinking like Omega Man. The story upon which it was based, which I think the Night of the Living Dead [inaudible 00:54:52]. In the book ... It's a spoiler. I shouldn't say what happens but it isn't good. Whereas in the movie, Charlton Heston, everything's okay to sort of reflects the different look of the culture of what [inaudible 00:55:09].

Dr. Kelly: Maybe that was in the 70s. Charlton Heston, right? Whereas the 2000s or the naughts or what have you, I don't know. That's a good question. I think a lot of that has to do with context. What's happening around the creation of these narratives.

Speaker 17: All of these apocalyptic predictions leave a very bad track record of predictions that don't come true yet people seem to still be really invested in them mentally. What makes them ignore all the thousands of bad ones in the past and all of a sudden true ...

Dr. Kelly: This is a beautiful question, right? People have been predicting the end of the world based on Ezekiel or Revelation or Daniel wrongly for thousands of years. What makes Harold Camping or Harold Lindsey or whoever think that their interpretation is finally right? Man, if I had the answer to that, I'd be a rich woman, right? I don't know. Maybe it's the hope that finally, we know. Finally we have the answer. That finally maybe we get it right. There's a wonderful clip from Parks and Rec where ... Yeah. There's a society of people who predict the end of the world regularly and they always get it wrong and Leslie says to them, "Well, math is hard, right?"

At the end of the day, Leslie promises to sign them up for the ice cream social that's going to happen on the day that they wanted to reserve the park for the end of the world and he says, "Oh, wait. I think I did the math wrong. It's the next day," and she said, "Don't worry. I'll save you some ice cream, right?" Then she scheduled the park for them the next day. Hope dies last, maybe. It's a good question. I don't know the answer. Yes?

Speaker 18: When you think about the vision [inaudible 00:57:16] and I'm wondering if we were [inaudible 00:57:29].

- Dr. Kelly: Yes. I haven't but I can tell you that there is a lovely book by a woman named Kelly Baker in which she reflects really thoughtfully and really nicely. It's called *The Zombies are Coming*. It's an e-book. You can get it on Amazon, in which she reflects really nicely on American gun culture and killing and zombies and what all of that might mean in terms of us and our context and how those threats interweave and I highly recommend it because she's done a lot of really thoughtful work on that subject exactly, including things like there's a gun company, and this is all in Kelly's book, Dr. Baker's book, where they have a target and you can buy a target called the ex-girlfriend and it's a zombie ex-girlfriend and then you can shoot that ex-girlfriend and what does that mean, and at what point have we crossed the line where, if you're not shooting at a target anymore, you're pretending to shoot a real person who you knew and loved and cared about presumably and highly recommend it. It's really good work. Yes?
- Speaker 19: Most scholars say that the Book of Apocalypse [inaudible 00:58:52] was used to encourage [inaudible 00:58:55] by the Romans, and the sign of the beast on the forehead was really a sign of those who worship the emperor because only those with the mark of the beast can engage in [commerce 00:59:15].
- Dr. Kelly: Yeah, absolutely.
- Speaker 19: Those who don't have that sign, cannot [crosstalk 00:59:21]. I think the key are the two symbols [inaudible 00:59:28] where the beast [inaudible 00:59:29] and the lamb, and the beast [inaudible 00:59:33] riding on the back of the beast. The beast destroys the [inaudible 00:59:45].
- Dr. Kelly: Yes, absolutely. I mean, amen. Yes. Again, I just want to reiterate, right? The point of the Book of Revelation is that there's hope for these Christians who are being persecuted or who perceive themselves as being persecuted by the Romans. There's hope that things are going to get better and there's hope that God will intervene in history and that Jesus, the Lamb, is God. Not the emperor. Not the emperor who claims to be the Son of God but Jesus and God. Absolutely. Yes?
- Speaker 20: You mentioned [inaudible 01:00:40] kind of zombification. I'm curious if there ain't other variables of literature at the time of like reanimation of corpses.
- Dr. Kelly: That's a good question. There is some stuff in Mesopotamian, ancient Mesopotamian works. I would have to do a little bit more research before I can answer this more fully but there's a lot of stories in ancient Mesopotamia that wrestle with the question [inaudible 01:01:06] means to be dead. Some stuff, yes, but I don't know that we have a Lazarus story.
- Speaker 20: [inaudible 01:01:15] the Gospels.
- Dr. Kelly: The world that produces the Gospels is temporally a little bit far away from that, but geographically sort of pulling right around there, absolutely.

Dr. Karen: It seems like Lazarus and hope are a great place to bring this evening to a close.
Thank you for coming out tonight and please join me in thanking Dr. Murphy.

Dr. Kelly: Thank you all very much. I know it's warm in here. You were a great audience.