Christianity, Boxing and Mixed Martial Arts: Theological Reflections

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The aim of this presentation is to provide a theological analysis of two violent combat sports, boxing and Mixed Martial Arts (MMA). The titles of the biographies of a number of well-known professional Christian boxers, such as God in My Corner (George Foreman, 2007) and Humble Warrior (Evander Holyfield, 1996) and the fact that ‘roughly 700 churches in the United States has begun incorporating MMA into their ministry in some capacity’ (Borer and Schafer 2011: 167) raises a host of ethical quandaries for the theologian. What role can or could boxing and MMA play in the life of a Christian? What good, if any, comes from these sports? And, how can or should the church engage violent combat sports such as these? Aside from a handful of essays in popular literature and some sociological and philosophical scholarly articles, there is to my knowledge no academic theological reflection on boxing and MMA. To begin a discussion on this topic, this presentation will comprise three sections: (i) a brief cultural history of boxing and MMA, (ii) an analysis of theories of violence, and (iii) a theological critique. In conclusion, I will provide suggestions as to how Christians and the Church should think about these activities and how they can advise others.

Biography

John Smith is a Professor of sports and theology at Chesterton University, Chesterton, US. His teaching and research interests center on tensions surrounding Christian involvement in sports.

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