

Sample Chapter from
[You Are What You See: Watching Movies Through a Christian Lens](#)
 by Scott Nehring — for review only.
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Christians and the Culture: Backseat Driving on the Road to Hell

“Turning the other cheek doesn’t mean
 accepting the arguments
 of evil men.”¹
 —K., regarding an online commentary

ONE OF THE MAIN FUNCTIONS OF ARTISTIC EXPRESSION IS TO HOLD A mirror up to society and reflect what truths may hide from normal view. Our entertainment industry, with its opinion of Christianity, has held up a fun-house mirror then complained we look funny.

Through the past fifty years American Christians have been asked to turn every cheek they have as they are pounded with the constant drumbeat that followers of Christ’s teachings are intolerant fools. Christian theology has

1. Comment of the Day: Stop Being Christian, It Makes Me Feel Funny. Good News Film Reviews. <http://www.goodnewsfilmreviews.com/2009/03/comment-of-day-stop-being-christian-it.html#comments>. Last accessed March, 2010. Used by permission.

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*You Are What You See: Watching Movies
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been openly maligned in films and television, and this misrepresentation is marketed to a worldwide audience.²

Christ-followers endure a parade of slights and insults to Christ while secular humanism marches brazenly into every aspect of our lives. Some advise us to forget the barbs, to take the mockery—it is all part of being a Christian. Peter told us to expect to get hammered for our beliefs: “However, if you suffer as a Christian, do not be ashamed, but praise God that you bear that name” (1 Pet. 4:16).

Acceptance of the mockery and criticism of the secular culture may appear to be the Christian thing to do. It gives, however, the illusion of a moral superiority over those who do the insulting: *They’re lost sinners so of course they’re going to attack us. We can rationalize away the feelings: The truth’s a hard thing to bear, and Sinners react as sinners will.*

It is Christ-like to forgive (Lk. 23:34), it is Christian to be patient (Ps. 37:7–9, Pv. 19:11), but it is *not* Scriptural to be a doormat for those who are wrong:

When Peter came to Antioch, I opposed him to his face, because he was clearly in the wrong. — Paul (Gal. 2:11)

You stiff-necked people, with uncircumcised hearts and ears!
You are just like your fathers: You always resist the Holy Spirit!
Was there ever a prophet your fathers did not persecute? They even killed those who predicted the coming of the Righteous One. And now you have betrayed and murdered him—you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it. —Stephen (Acts 7:51–53)

When we take the insults of the ungodly lying down and let those who abuse us do as they please, we can grow accustomed to the humiliation. Let yourself be a victim too long and eventually you will be defined by your victimization.

It is a grave mistake to define ourselves by the perceptions of today’s cultural leaders. We must return to defining ourselves by our service to Christ:

But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed.
“Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.” But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give

2. An ironic twist is that most Americans profess to be active Christians; so the entertainment industry has loudly proclaimed a majority of their American audience is inherently wrong and dangerous. [In 2008, over seventy-five percent of American adults identified themselves as “Christian.” It should be noted that the term “Christian” can be broadly defined within the context of the survey. (Barry A. Kosmin and Ariela Keysar. *American Religious Identification Survey, 2008*. Trinity College, Hartford, Connecticut.)]

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an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander. It is better, if it is God's will, to suffer for doing good than for doing evil. — Peter (1 Pet. 3:14–17)

The conflict between church-goers and the Arts is a long, ongoing scuffle of ideas and ideals. Traditional religionists favor a more rigid and lawful society. Conversely, artists' natural inclinations toward feelings and emotional examination often sets them against the rigors of faith. Yet despite their natures, the influence of Christ's presence imposes itself upon an artist's work.

A culture fueled by Christ breeds the best of human endeavor. Regardless of Shakespeare's, Mozart's, or Da Vinci's confrontations with authority, they were still held to a high standard because of the overriding Christian influence on their thinking and culture. These standards, bolstered by the Christian worldview, allowed their talents to flourish.

Today, the Christian mold has been broken and replaced with something far less constructive. Our civilization once produced foundational works that fed the minds of generations. Now it churns out swill that cannot sustain us for a full news cycle. Where we once had the Sistine Chapel and Beethoven's Fifth Symphony, we now have "Piss Christ" and *Borat*.

Christians are notorious complainers about the trash-culture we live with, but there is one thing most Christians refuse to see: We only have ourselves to blame.

The entertainment industry insidiously portrays Christians as dangerous throwbacks to the Spanish Inquisition or the Salem Witch Trials, so Christians have turned up their collective noses in disgust at the entire industry. This has led much of the church in the United States to refuse to deal with the broader society and, thereby, has abandoned it to the millions who consume whatever Hollywood chooses to sell.

Rather than remain relevant, Christians retreated into the development of our own separate subculture. We armed ourselves with Bibles, boxed sets of the *Left Behind* series, and autographed John the Baptist commemorative plates and now stand firm against the dung brokers of Hollywood. We produce irritating pop music and pride ourselves on a straight-to-video film industry that has claimed for decades it was about to break into the mainstream.

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In actuality, we have disengaged from the mainstream and settled for being an eddy, a cultural pond known as Christian Media.

Examining Our Reflection

By definition, a pond is a shallow, often stagnant body that does little beyond feed the plants within its reach. Like today's Christian media, it has no directional flow and ultimately serves no purpose beyond its own boundaries.

This disengagement from the world is a mistake and, I believe, one of the major reasons our culture is withering.

Innumerable Christians have told me they have not seen a film in years or, in some cases, have never seen one. These Christians have checked out of the culture—in direct disobedience to Jesus:

You are the salt of the earth, but if salt has lost its taste, how shall its saltiness be restored? It is no longer good for anything except to be thrown out and trampled under people's feet.

You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do people light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a stand, and it gives light to all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good works and give glory to your Father who is in heaven
— Jesus (Matt. 5:14–15).

What good is salt if it has lost its savor and its ability to permeate and preserve? What good is a light if it is hidden?

While Christian media is not inherently a bad thing, a media that leads people into theological isolation is troublesome. It is now too common, too acceptable for Christians to hide in their media echo-chambers and chant, "Be saved, and then keep to yourself." That is not enough.

God has delivered you despite your sinful nature, despite the fact you did nothing to deserve it. His grace is greater than your depravity. He died for your sins. He paid your price. You are to spread His word and share in His glory, not just with other Christians but with people who have not yet experienced His love.

Films are a mode of communication. They are a tool. It is time we used that tool to influence the world. For too long we have blamed the medium of film for how secularists have used it; we have cast all film aside or relied only on the most simplistic products because of a belief that films are corrupting.

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Would you refuse to ever again use a hammer because a sinner used one to build a whorehouse?

The entertainment industry is made up of people; flesh and blood human beings like us, with all the same faults, fears, and positive qualities you and I possess—people who, like us, are lost until they find *The Way*. With prayer, the Lord's guidance, and inventive, hard-working artists we can help culture find its way home.

It is God's people who are uniquely equipped to step into leadership positions. There are Christian filmmakers and production studios, even film departments on Christian college campuses. The foundations are in place. Why then have we failed to have an impact? Failed to counter the destructive voices in the mainstream? We have attempted to offer a healthy alternative to the poison currently offered by the film industry, but why do general audiences turn up their noses at what we produce?

Any discussion on how we define ourselves must begin with a frank look at who we are today. If we hope to produce change, we must first examine our own reflection and be honest about what is there.

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