



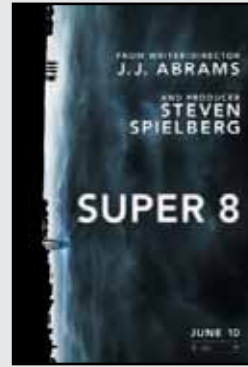
Movies and Culture Report

NEW:

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Summer's Mixed Bag



Spectacles, Social Marketing, and Schlock

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THEATRICAL RELEASES

June 3



X-Men: First Class (PG-13 for violence, action, language, scary images) Before they were archenemies, Charles Xavier and Erik “Magneto” Lensherr were closest of friends, working together to stop the greatest threat the world has ever known.. ([Watch the trailer.](#)) James McAvoy, Jennifer Lawrence, Michael Fassbender, Rose Byrne, January Jones, Kevin Bacon.

What does a self-referential culture do when they run out of Saturday morning cartoons, superheroes, sitcoms, and sequels to remake? Easy—they start rehashing.

Gen-Xers have seen every recognizable cultural media artifact from their childhoods reprocessed into the Hollywood drivel of unnecessary sequels, re-dos, and revisions; even *Fright Night*'s been remade and a reunion sequel to *American Pie* is in the works, for Pete's sake. It's clear that the well for Hollywood's retro binge has run dry.

Rather than exert the creativity to develop new content with fresh storylines and characters, the powers-that-be refill that well by regurgitating previously consumed material.

Given the money at stake, the X-Men brand should have sprouted a strong and lucrative franchise the first time around; instead, it was quickly run into the ground, overwhelmed by weak plots and increasingly overt homosexual context.

It is possible the filmmakers of *First Class* have put more care into this product in an attempt to energize the franchise anew; but even if this is the best film of the year (which I'm confident it won't be), that does not overcome the fact this McMovie was produced to do nothing more than separate the movie-goer from their cash.

If we continue to rehash our culture we will continue to choke on its torpid dregs.





THEATRICAL RELEASES, continued



Beginners (R for language, sexual content) A young man is shocked when his grandfather announces that not only is he dying of cancer but he has a young, male lover—as though there haven’t been enough films covering the dramatic details of homosexuality. ([Watch the trailer.](#)) Ewan McGregor, Christopher Plummer, Mélanie Laurent.

This is social marketing. Whether intentional or not, accepted social order is questioned and homosexuality is promoted.

With Grandpa’s descent into a self-destructive lifestyle, the story inherently states that even though people live their lives one way, many secretly desire something else, in this case homosexuality.

Since the storyline focuses on the grandfather and grandson, do they deal with the truth that had Grandpa’s desires been pursued earlier in life, Grandson might never have been born?

Grandpa is dying of cancer. Do they deal with the fact homosexuals are far more likely to die young, to contract numerous diseases, and to suffer other medical problems, in disproportionate frequency to the heterosexual population?

How does the selfish exploration of deviant sexual desires impact the confused young man Grandpa shacks up with? Won’t this possibly shorten the life of that young man?

What of the emotional and psychological dysfunction reflected by a young man who would hook up with an elderly man?

These issues will probably be either ignored or played down. The problem won’t be that a dying, elderly man has careless sex with a young man; the problem presented by the storyline will deal with the confusion of (and probably lack of understanding by) the people who surround him. Grandpa and his behavior won’t be the problem, everyone else will be, and, by extension, the audience’s “homophobia” (a.k.a. the natural reaction to homosexual behavior) will probably be identified as the worst problem of all.

continued, pg 4





THEATRICAL RELEASES, continued

(Beginners, continued)

As I said in my post about the trailer, linked above,

Thank the Lord there is finally a movie made about screwed up and despondent urbanites. At last the morally retarded have their say.

Seriously, what is it that draws independent filmmakers to make a continual stream of depressing flicks about characters that most people wouldn't want to know in real life? This thing looks like a cinematic pity party.

One commenter to my post responded,

The people who make these films are unlikable and think everyone else is too.

A cynical response? Possibly, but an accurate one.

Also

Submarine A British comedy by Ben Stiller; "15-year-old Oliver Tate has two objectives: To lose his virginity before his next birthday, and to extinguish the flame between his mother and an ex-lover who has resurfaced in her life." — sounds hysterical, right?

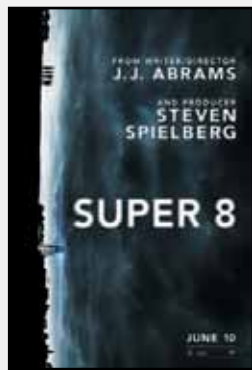
Beautiful Boy drama; "A married couple on the verge of separation are leveled by the news their 18-year-old son committed a mass shooting at his college, then took his own life."





THEATRICAL RELEASES, continued

June 10



Super8 (PG-13 for action, violence, language, drug use) Producer/Writer/Director J. J. Abrams teams up with Stephen Spielberg for one of the summer's expected hits. ([Watch the trailer.](#)) Elle Fanning, Amanda Michalka, Ron Eldard, Noah Emmerich, Kyle Chandler.

One look at the trailer and it's obvious Abrams is channeling Spielberg's earlier Hollywood flicks (*E.T.: The Extra Terrestrial*, *Close Encounters of the Third Kind*, *Jurassic Park*). The style looks identical. Even the storyline screams Spielberg.

It's the 1970s. As a group of small-town kids make a super-8 film, they witness and record a horrific train derailment. Soon locals begin to disappear; the sheriff and kids must uncover an incredible secret.

I hope this movie is as good as its hype—not because I'm a huge fan of Abrams work, but because this film is one of the only big-ticket, **original** productions in theaters during the next few months.



Trolljegeren "The Troll Hunter" (Not Yet Rated) Norwegian horror thriller about a band of students who investigate a series of strange, bear killings in the wilderness. They discover the titular trolls and, well, they hunt them. ([Watch the trailer.](#)) Otto Jespersen, Robert Stoltenberg, Knut Nærum.

At first glance, this could seem like a cheesy, stupid B-grade film. If that's your impression, watch the trailer linked above. Despite the corny description, all reports claim there is much more going on with this production.

Also

The Chameleon biography thriller; FBI Agent tracks a man who has taken the identity of a woman's long lost son; French, filmed in Louisiana

Viva Riva! drama; man living in the Congo plots to steal barrels of fuel to sell for huge profit; French

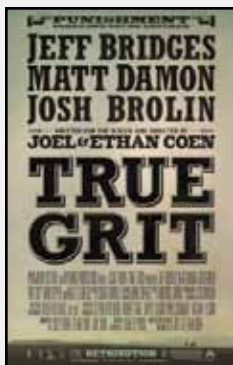
The Trip comedy; road trip with a food critic





DVD RELEASES

June 7



True Grit (PG-13 for some intense sequences of western violence including disturbing images) Jeff Bridges, Matt Damon, Barry Pepper, Josh Brolin, Hailee Steinfeld. ([Watch the trailer.](#))

([Read the review.](#)) For all my whining and complaining about remakes and sequels, there are times I'm forced to eat crow. This is one of those times.

Brothers Ethan and Joel Coen have surpassed John Wayne's original classic. Buttressed by detailed performances by Jeff Bridges (Rooster Cockburn) and Hailee Steinfeld (Mattie Ross), the Coens produced a gem of a film worthy of all ten Oscar nominations it received. What is important with this film is that they **improved** upon the earlier work and advanced the art of cinema through their effort. This film was not made for a quick buck but rather to tell a strong story in the best way possible. If more filmmakers would approach remakes with such care, our culture would not be in the standstill it is today.



Just Go With It (PG-13 for frequent crude and sexual content, partial nudity, brief drug references, language) Adam Sandler, Jennifer Aniston, Nicole Kidman, Nick Swardson, Brooklyn Decker.

The trailer focuses on an actress's jiggling breasts instead of actual laughs. I didn't link to the trailer here—it's just 'sex sells garbage.' If you decide to see it, turn off your brain, leave your expectations at

home, and just give them your money.

Also

Secret at Arrow Lake "A stranger in a small town, a young woman searching for her father, and the shocking family secret that will change their lives."

The Company Men three men survive corporate downsizing

Shadows and Lies a man rescues a woman he barely knows from a NY crime syndicate

Sanctum crisis occurs during underwater cave diving





DVD RELEASES, continued

June 14



Red Riding Hood (PG-13 for violence and creature terror, some sensuality) Amanda Seyfried, Lukas Haas, Billy Burke, Virginia Madsen, Julie Christie, Gary Oldman. ([Watch the trailer.](#))

The sexualization of children is a known, problematic issue within our society. Often overlooked, though, is the general abandonment of *childhood* for our children. Fairy tales have been deconstructed (*Shrek*), mocked (*Hoodwinked*), and, as this film reveals, re-envisioned from accepted morality lessons to be transformed into ugly, sexual tales.

This move from the childish to an adult view of “Little Red Riding Hood” isn’t the first of its kind; 1984’s *The Company of Wolves* is another example. And I doubt this will be the last time this is done. As cultural elites deconstruct Western Civilization, the fairy tales and myths told to our children for generations must be abandoned.

How many children under the age of ten have been told these tantalizing tales which impart the importance of being wise and discerning (“Little Red Riding Hood”), always telling the truth (“The Boy Who Cried Wolf”), building your life on a solid foundation (“The Three Little Pigs”), or caring for others regardless of appearance (“The Frog Prince”)? Many children enter their teen years without these stories in their mental libraries.

The dangers of growing up too quickly is a subject covered in a wide variety of psychological, sociological, and theological publications, but instead of bringing tried-and-true children’s tales to the big screen for the benefit of our next generation, the cultural elites seem more comfortable sexing up these stories to release films such as this into the wild.





DVD RELEASES, continued



Battle: Los Angeles (PG-13 for sustained and intense sequences of war violence and destruction, language) Aaron Eckhart, Michelle Rodriguez, Michael Peña, Bridget Moynahan.

([Watch the trailer.](#))

([Read the review.](#))

Film trailer? One of the best ever released; outstanding stuff.

The movie? Not so much.

A number of critics were willing to overlook deep flaws in the story because they were impressed by the pro-American/pro-military view expressed by the movie.

Bottom line, though, is that bad filmmaking is bad filmmaking regardless of the filmmaker's views or political opinions. Yes, it's nice to see pro-American aspects to the plot, but that cannot be our criterion for why we recommend or condemn a film.

Also

Hall Pass comedy; husband is given the opportunity to have an affair

Korkoro drama; France during WWII and how Gypsies were swept up in the Holocaust

Kill the Irishman biography crime thriller; true story of Danny Greene, an Irish thug working for Cleveland mobsters in the 1970s





Culture Links

Katy Perry [laments her strict Christian upbringing](#).

“I come from a very non-accepting family, but I’m very accepting,” she said.

“Russell is into Hinduism, and I’m not really involved in it. He meditates in the morning and the evening and I’m starting to do it more because it really centers me.” She added, “But I just let him be him, and he lets me be me.”

You’re in a bad place when being “centered” is more important than being saved.

Remember: artists, even dumb ones, are who shape our cultural identity.

Do personal beliefs affect the careers of Hollywood artists?

Patricia Heaton of *Everybody Loves Raymond* fame [claims that her politics has cost her work](#) in the industry.

Passion of the Christ star Jim Caviezel [claims “Playing Jesus wrecked my career.”](#)

Conversely, *Pirates of the Caribbean* series producer Jerry Bruckheimer [states that his conservative politics have not gotten in the way](#) of his career.

All three individuals are talented and successful, but they have differing views on industry reactions to faith and conservative attitudes.

Personally, I’ve experienced the bite of the industry’s leftist gatekeepers. I tend to side with Heaton and Caviezel’s opinions rather than Bruckheimer’s.

Bruckheimer is a money man and wields a huge amount of power. He can think and do just about anything he wants as long as he keeps making blockbusters. Heaton and Caviezel, while household names, are still working actors. They have a different role in the industry—both must be **hired** in order to work whereas Bruckheimer does the hiring.

Also note that Heaton and Caviezel have staked ground founded upon their beliefs; Bruckheimer’s work does not reflect his politics. It’s easy to claim there isn’t a bias if you’re not producing the work that ignites the bigotry.





Culture Quote

What has happened to the ability of modern Christians to truly think and dissect all aspects of a subtle work of art?

What has happened to our ability to know how to think, period?

Most Christian commentators and Christian writers are not deep. The folks writing these supposedly deep books come from strange disciplines where they study a lot of modern books but they never studied the great theological books of Christians from other ages or other countries. They don't know that some of the objections or ideas showing up in modern books are old as heck. And because they don't read as widely as they should...they basically think they are asking new questions and stating new propositions...not knowing that they are showing their ignorance.

– Carole McDonnell, writer
from [*Discernment: Art and Christian Mumbo-Jumbo*](#)





Movie Watching Tip

R-Rated Toys



I was in the toy section of Walmart recently, looking to buy a little something for my son. I'm sifting through the Batman and Iron Man junk, Hotwheels and Legos nonsense, when I stumble upon these items (above, right): a bunch of action figures representing each of the main characters from Oliver Stone's violent, R-Rated, Vietnam War film *Platoon*—a film that displays all manner of violence from dismemberment and gaping head wounds to torture and child rape. And there, right there next to the Incredible Hulk and Spider-man, are the action figures for those dysfunctional soldiers being sold for our kids to play with. [I looked, but, no, they didn't have the rifle/bong in the accessories pack.]

A store employee walked by, so I pointed out these *Platoon* toys and asked if they had any for *The Deer Hunter*. She didn't think that was funny.

As my generation grows older, we realize we have never been forced to act like adults. We are a generation of aimless man-children who strive to meet the lack of expectations placed upon us. A symptom of this is the thriving market for action figures and other toys associated with films geared, not for children, but for us, the older set.

As pathetic as it is, collectible toys which support adult films are good business. Plenty of dullards buy up all those dolls and comic books—now given fancy names like “action figures” and “graphic

continued pg 12





MOVIE WATCHING TIP, continued



novels”—and gleefully strengthen the tether binding them to their childhood fancies. If this is what you do, knock yourself out. If you think being a 40-year-old man and happily owning a King Leonidas action figure from *300* is cool, well that’s your business. Who am I to point out that real men have better things to do than mess around with dolls?

Most alarming, though, is the development of toys from R- and PG-13–Rated films that are marketed directly to and for children. Studios may know small children shouldn’t see films like *300*, *Terminator*, *Rambo*, or the plethora of other movies laced with adult content, but their marketing efforts are, nevertheless, aimed at young children. This is a confusing message for the culture and supports the Gen-Xers’ lack of parental control when it comes to protecting our children from harsh content.

When we buy this stuff, I think we send the message that we both accept the marketers’ messages (“It’s okay to market these kinds of toys to children”) and are willing to pass those messages on to our kids (“Adult things are not just for adults”).

If you give your kids toys based on R-Rated movies, maybe it doesn’t necessarily indicate you’re a bad parent. I would never suggest that—unless it’s a toy celebrating murderous Communists like *Che*.





WHY I BELIEVE PIRATES OF THE CARIBBEAN DOES NOT SATISFY

by Scott Nehring

Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides fails because the filmmakers leaned too heavily on an amusing character to the exclusion of what makes movie-going worthwhile.

When *Pirates of the Caribbean: The Curse of the Black Pearl* was initially released, expectations were not high. It was a huge-budget movie based on a theme-park ride populated by pirates. What should have been a flashy-but-hollow cinematic experience turned out to be a marvelous, intricately crafted movie worthy of praise. Johnny Depp's inventiveness as the film's most memorable element, the staggering, sly trickster Jack Sparrow, along with a well-tuned and layered narrative by screenwriters Ted Elliot and Terry Rossio established *The Curse of the Black Pearl* with a firm foundation for a film franchise.

What was truly remarkable about the film was its odd story structure. If asked, most people claimed the hero was Jack Sparrow ("There should be a *Captain* in there somewhere."), not only of the first film but also of the entire original trilogy. He was not. The story's hero was Will Turner.¹

The Curse of the Black Pearl centers on Will's attempt to woo Elizabeth Swann. In the opening scenes, he bumbles while in her presence and is restricted from courting her because of his own moral code and social status. By film's end he has adopted the pirate lifestyle and, thereby, won her heart.

In the broader story structure of the full trilogy, Will's drive to reunite and save his father becomes the driving force of the storyline. Only when this has been completed are the three films at an end.

Many audience members were put off by the complicated plots of the second and third *Pirates* movies. As the trilogy progressed, Will and Elizabeth were pushed further into the background, made subordinate to Depp's powerful Sparrow performances. The films' convoluted plots were caused by this unnatural sharing of the spotlight.





In *Black Pearl*, Will remained firmly affixed at story's center. He was a boring lead, however, so the character of Sparrow was pumped up; a situation that worked as long as Will's story was central. The more prominent the Sparrow character became, the less meaningful, concise, or enjoyable the film's story became.

Sparrow's gaining of the heroic spotlight not only helped to derail the earlier films, it also created the failure of *Pirates of the Caribbean: On Stranger Tides*. True, the problematic script has numerous issues, but I believe the lack of a relevant hero is the missing cornerstone which allowed the whole story to cave in upon itself.

Captain Jack Sparrow is not a hero; rather, he falls within the secondary, rival archetype. Sparrow is Han Solo to Will Turner's Luke Skywalker. It's common to see this rival character add flash and moral confusion to a storyline in the filmmaker's attempt to prop up a rather straight-forward, if not down-right dry, heroic lead.

While secondary characters like Sparrow and Solo are attractive, fun, and charismatic, they only work

because they have the hero posing as the straight man. Without the hero's steadfast morality, the secondary loses the comparison that makes him shine. He becomes a trickster with no one to trick, and in *On Stranger Tides*, Will and Elizabeth are inexplicitly missing. The audience is left with Jack Sparrow as the central heroic figure.

The whole point of Captain Jack Sparrow is that he is devilish. He is a liar, a thief, and a scoundrel who does not retain any redeemable qualities other than his charm and humor. In the hero's role, he provides the audience with no moral lesson, which is the chief responsibility of the hero character.²

Elliot and Rossio attempt to correct this fundamental problem by making Sparrow more "good" in *On Stranger Tides*; for example, the film opens with Sparrow going to great lengths to save a friend and crewmate. This transformation into "good guy" can't last, however, if they want to keep the basic essence of Sparrow's character; he is, after all, a selfish thief. The kudos of any good deed he is forced to perform are reduced by the ignominy of the evil deeds he must do to remain consistent with his established character.





The moral vacuum created by Will and Elizabeth's absence simply cannot be filled by a scheming pirate.

An attempt to patch this gaping hole was made by the obtuse insertion into the storyline of a young, steadfast clergyman, Phillip, and a young, frightened mermaid, Syrena. These two characters, however, are not brought into the story until all other characters and motivations have been firmly established, which makes their arrival and eventual love story seem foreign. Furthermore, Philip's spouts of dialogue regarding faith and morality are the film's only tilt toward any ethical standards, and with those proclamations quickly and easily dismissed by his pirate captors, any lesson or meaning within the story soon comes to an end.

Screenwriters Elliot and Rossio swapped the original roles of Will Turner and Jack Sparrow: Will was the hero without any flash; if *Black Pearl* had been only about him, moviegoers would have been unable to sit through the film; Sparrow breathed life into the story and made it consumable. Despite Depp's fun performance in *On Stranger Tides*, Jack is a poor heroic character who can't hold together a watchable movie (eventually his deviousness must overwhelm his

better qualities), therefore Elliot and Rossio created Philip (an early-Will Turner-type heroic character) to perform the responsibilities of the traditional hero. Since Philip raises the moral issues and attempts to save the damsel in distress (Syrena, held captive by the pirates), he becomes the story's stand-in hero.

A hero can be a weak character but a weak character can't be a hero. The heroic role serves a definite purpose. The hero is the driver of the narrative, and he does so through the film's moral argument ("and the moral of the story is . . ."). The hero's firm and upright beliefs are the central philosophy of the storyline; that is why at some point within the story the hero is willing to sacrifice himself, even his life, for an ideal—something Sparrow never does.

At some point within a story the audience needs to appreciate the hero's ethical stance. This connection on a moral level cements the relationship between hero and audience. Without a moral understanding, the audience may be amused by a character but they will never be moved by him.





1. For additional information and insight on the role of Hero, see Chapter 15, “Many Heroes—One Man,” of Scott’s book, *You Are What You See: Watching Movies Through a Christian Lens*. Excerpt:

Neo from *The Matrix*, Forrest Gump, and the mythological Perseus appear to have little in common. One is a computer geek, the second a slow-witted runner, and the third a Greek warrior—about as different as men can get. But one thing ties each of these characters together: they are all heroes.

Each of these characters is the center of their own story and performs heroic deeds which transform them from a common person into a heroic figure. Through their transformations, their worlds are also changed for the better. Neo grows from a grumbling geek with a dead-end job to become the savior of all mankind. Forrest Gump grows from an ostracized, developmentally-disabled child into a millionaire shrimp tycoon. Perseus begins as an exiled child and becomes a grand hero foretold by prophecy. Each of these characters, despite their differences, share backgrounds and personal traits.

At the center of a story is a singular, identifiable heroic character, shades of the same person whether named Jack Ryan (*The Hunt for Red October*), Annie Sullivan (*The Miracle Worker*), or Chance the bulldog (*Homeward Bound*). Despite country, color, class, or gender, the hero retains the same traits and performs the same tasks at roughly the same places in each story told.

Traits of the Hero

Like The Great Story structure discussed earlier, every hero has an identical framework. Traits and actions of the hero identify him as heroic in our collective understanding. ... Not all traits are seen in every hero, but a sufficient number of them will be found—like a character-trait buffet; a little from here, a little from there, and the hero emerges. Here is an examination of each of these traits. ...

2. Chapter 20, “The Great Story,” of *You Are What You See* reveals the basics of the hero’s character arc and purpose. Excerpt:

Act One establishes the purpose of the story... We are introduced to the hero, villain, any surrogates, and the world in which the story takes place. ... Act Two sees the hero as he begins his journey He must learn the rules, get to know the other players, develop his skills and abilities, then challenge the villain. In Act Three, his heroic stature is tested and it appears he is not a hero after all, only another regular guy. His earlier successes are eclipsed by a series of failures. Act Four shows the hero finally heroic and the villain is ready to fight. At the end, the moral of the story is exemplified in the life of the hero.





At Rest

[Daniel 12:13](#)

Don Krim (1945–2011)

Film Distributor

As President of Kino International, Don Krim was responsible for bringing many of the world's great cinematic masterpieces to American audiences. If you've enjoyed a quality foreign film, chances are you have Krim's lifelong commitment to film to thank. Three of Kino International's titles have earned Academy Award nominations in the Best Foreign Language Film category: *Beaufort* (2007), *Ajami* (2009), and *Dogtooth* (2010).

Krim is widely considered to have been one of the "good guys" in the industry. His love for the art of cinema is apparent in his work and in the films he championed.



Jeff Conaway (1950–2011)

Actor

Today's audiences may recognize Jeff Conaway from his stints on *Celebrity Rehab With Dr. Drew*. Conaway's lifelong battle with cocaine addiction came to define the once-rising star.

He began his career at the age of 10 in the Pulitzer Prize-winning play *All the Way Home*. He slowly rose through the ranks and peaked with his performances as Kenickie in the film version of *Grease* and as Bobby Wheeler on the TV sitcom *Taxi*. Conaway removed himself from the successful sitcom due to depression and never regained career momentum, though he remained a bit player in film and television.

Conaway's life shows that even those with position and talent can be taken down by untended personal demons and addictions.





“Scott Nehring has created a wonderful mix of history, story structure, and discussion **important to people of faith** who are film students, industry insiders, culture creators and **those who analyze film without checking their minds, ethics and morals at the door.**” - John Bucher, instructor, L.A. Film School

Information

Learn more about Story. Buy the book: YouAreWhatYouSee.com.

Find Scott Nehring's latest film reviews: GoodNewsFilmReviews.com.

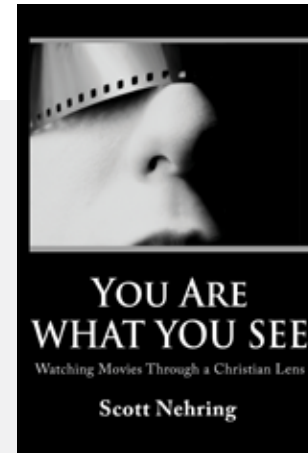
Scott is an award-winning screenwriter and film critic whose reviews have been published on a number of websites across the United States, Australia, and India including Reuters.com, USA Today.com, *The Chicago Times*, FoxNews.com, and a variety of local news stations across America.



As a former screenwriter, Scott is focused on balancing his love of story structure and cinema with his Christian faith. He loves to teach film studies to Christians, showing them how to read films and how to deal with the sometimes thorny subject of engaging modern culture.

Scott was a co-founder of the [Catholic Media Review](http://CatholicMediaReview.com). His current reviews can be found at [Good News Film Reviews](http://GoodNewsFilmReviews.com) and at ChristianCinema.com.

Good News Film Reviews (GNFR) was established in June 2007 to discuss film and culture from a Christian perspective. From the first post onward, Scott has called for Christians to change both the way they view film and how they engage in culture. GNFR fell quiet following a short sabbatical, was re-launched in January 2008, and has been going strong since. GNFR is also home site for the Carnival of Cinema, a bi-weekly collection of film-related posts submitted from around the world. The Carnival of Cinema has been in operation since September 2006.



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