

# ARTS & Entertainment

## ‘Selma It Is’

Film Illuminates King’s Work and Religion’s Role in Civil-Rights Movement

BY STEVEN D. GREYDANUS

**S***elma* achieves something few historical films do: It captures a sense of events unfolding in the present tense, in a political and cultural climate as complex, multifaceted and undetermined as the times we live in, to show how the Alabama city of Selma became the battleground of civil rights.

It offers a portrait of one of the 20th century’s most iconic leaders, Martin Luther King Jr., here seen not as an icon, a saint or a prophet leading his people to divinely assured victory, but as a tactician carefully picking and choosing both his battles and his battlegrounds, at times worrying and doubting whether he has chosen well or poorly, and aware of the terrible cost that could result either way.

He is a great man, but *Selma* knows history is not written by great men acting alone. For that matter, great men come with baggage that may at times be an impediment to the cause.

It’s no secret that King and Malcolm X (who appears briefly in the film) didn’t see eye to eye, among other things, on nonviolent resistance. It’s more surprising to see leaders of Selma’s Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC, pronounced “Snick”) not exactly welcoming King with open arms — in fact, questioning his motives and his commitment to their cause.

King’s response to that challenge confirms his greatness. As brilliantly portrayed by David Oyelowo (outstanding in *The But-*

*ler* as one of King’s supporters in Selma), King is charismatic and lucid, collaborative but in charge.

In a few brief, well-delivered lines, King highlights the urgency of the cause, praises the grassroots work of SNCC activists, highlights what distinguishes his own efforts on the national stage — and then asks for their input on whether conditions in Selma are right for his approach.

Consider all this scene does at once: It conveys important historical context about King’s recent successes and failures. It highlights different approaches to nonviolent resistance and illuminates what made King’s approach so effective, reclaiming it from its somewhat domesticated public image today as the deliberately provocative, courageous thing it was. Finally, it showcases what makes King such an effective leader: his intelligence and eloquence, his magnetism and his ability to turn conflict into consensus.

This is typical of *Selma*’s method. It is a talky film, but there’s always more going on than meets the eye. The film wisely focuses on one chapter in King’s long career — I love the fact that it’s called *Selma* rather than *King* — but the bigger picture is always in view. The screenplay, initially written by Paul Webb but significantly revised by director Ava DuVernay, picks its starting and ending points shrewdly but is acutely aware that the struggle began long before the film starts, and when the film ends, it is far from over.

A well-crafted series of opening scenes sets the stage. We meet

King and his wife, Coretta (Carmen Ejogo), in December 1964 in a hotel room in Oslo, Norway, where King is about to receive the Nobel Peace Prize. King’s acceptance speech (paraphrased due to copyright issues involving the King estate and an unproduced film project) is presented in voice-over as the film cuts to a church stairwell, where a number

of young girls in their Sunday best chatter about Coretta King’s hair. Even if you recognize that this scene, a flashback to Birmingham in 1963, illustrates King’s words about accepting the award “on behalf of our lost ones, whose deaths paved our path,” the dialogue lulls you into not expecting the horrific moment to come.

The aftermath fades into a voter-registration form that an older black woman, Annie Lee Cooper (Oprah Winfrey), is carefully filling out, to no avail. The connection between the two scenes highlights the ongoing reality of hatred and the threat of violence hanging over the efforts of people like Cooper, who dare to exercise their rights. Cooper’s defeat in this scene leads directly to an Oval Office meeting between King and President Lyndon Johnson (Tom Wilkinson), who supports King’s cause but doesn’t give him the answer he wants on voting-rights legislation. So — “Selma it is,” King tells his companions as they leave the White House, and the stage is set.

Historical questions about the film’s depiction of Johnson and King as antagonists are somewhat overblown. Johnson is not a villain

or adversary; *Selma* is clear that he supports civil rights and ranks the 1964 Civil Rights Act among his proudest achievements. But King, Johnson points out, has one issue; the president has many, and he considers the “War on Poverty” a more pressing priority than voting rights, which, “technically,” blacks already have. Thanks to the Cooper scene, we already know how hollow that “technically” is.

Occasional scene-setting introductory titles are given an ominous twist by presenting them as surveillance logs from FBI agents working for J. Edgar Hoover, who considers King “a political and moral degenerate.” King’s relationship with Coretta is warm and affectionate, but an unspoken tension exists between them, coming to the surface only once, in a scene of piercing frankness and sadness.

*Selma* is punctuated by sickening violence — sometimes courted and not unexpected, as in the notorious attack by state troopers of the Selma marchers at the Edmund Pettus Bridge, but at other times out of the blue and without warning, either for characters or viewers. In one scene, a white character who has traveled to Selma to support King is chatting thoughtfully when he is abruptly attacked by vengeful locals. Nothing about the scene foreshadows that he is about to die.

The man is a pastor (another character calls him a “priest,” though he was actually a Unitarian), and the role of religion in *Selma* is one of the most gratifying things about the film. *Selma* not only highlights the centrality of King’s own faith to his actions, it



**DYNAMIC LEADER.** David Oyelowo portrays Martin Luther King Jr. Paramount Pictures

shows how the civil-rights movement as a whole was animated by religious conviction, led by clergy of churches that were the backbone of the black community.

Even more heartening, after the attack at the Edmund Pettus Bridge, King issues a call for solidarity from believers, and specifically clergy, of all races — and among those responding to this call are white Catholic priests, nuns and others who join King in a second march to the bridge. An Orthodox bishop — Archbishop Iakovos, Greek Orthodox primate of the Americas — is among them; there is also a rabbi. Archival footage of the third, successful march to Montgomery, seen in the final minutes of the film, attests to the truthfulness of this portrayal of ecumenical solidarity of Catholics and Protestants, blacks and whites at this crucial moment.

Pope John Paul II, addressing black Catholics in New Orleans in 1987, spoke of King’s “providential role” in “contributing to the rightful human betterment of black Americans and therefore to the improvement of American society itself.” He even went so far as to call King’s liberating action “a sign and expression of Christ’s paschal mystery, which in every

age is effective in helping God’s people to pass from bondage into their glorious vocation of full Christian freedom.”

*Selma* — the first big-screen feature film to focus on King — is a vital, important cinematic tribute to this providential moment in history. It is also, in more ways than one, a pointed reminder that King’s work is far from over.

When my friend and fellow film critic Jeff Overstreet posted on Facebook about the Academy Awards’ widely derided snubbing of *Selma* in all but two categories (best picture and best original song), a white commenter replied, “They gave *12 Years a Slave* the PC prize last year. I think it’s time for black Hollywood to find a new story to tell.” Think about that amazing comment when you watch *Selma*, and contemplate how far we have come — and how much remains to be done.

Steven D. Greydanus is the Register’s film critic and creator of Decent Films.

**Caveat Spectator:** Scenes of strong violence; references to marital infidelity and brief audio of bedroom sounds; limited profanity, crude language and some racial epithets. Teens and up.

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# ARTS & Entertainment

## TV Picks

April 19-May 2  
All Times Eastern  
By Daniel J. Engler

**SUNDAYS, April 19 and 26, 5pm**

The Church Universal

**EWTN** On April 19, Father Joseph Mary Wolfe's guests are from the Catholic Association of Latino Leaders, whose members foster Catholic education and promote evangelization via the media. Re-airs 5am Tuesday and 10pm Friday. On April 26, Father Wolfe interviews Supreme Knight F. DeKarlo Blackmon of the Knights of Peter Claver, an African-American lay Catholic fraternal group. Re-airs 10pm Friday.

**WEDNESDAY, April 22, 8:30am**

**Tech Effect: Washington Crossing the Delaware**

**HISTORY** On the freezing night of Dec. 25-26, 1776, Gen. George Washington led his Continental Army troops across the Delaware River to attack and defeat Hessian forces in Trenton, N.J. This show spotlights the crossing's ferries and Durham boats, as well as the pocket watches that synchronized the operation. Advisory: TV-PG.

**WEDNESDAY, April 22, 9pm**

**Nova: Invisible Universe Revealed**

**PBS** The Hubble Space Telescope was launched in 1990, refitted by astronauts in 1993, and serviced in 1997, 1999, 2002 and 2009. In this program, scientists and engineers discuss Hubble's amazing photos and their significance.

**SUNDAY, April 26, 4pm**

**The Pride of the Yankees**

**TURNER CLASSIC MOVIES** This classic 1942 story of the New York Yankees' beloved slugger Lou Gehrig (1903-1941) depicts his baseball prowess, but even more his character and courage in the face of a fatal illness, which made him, said his manager Joe McCarthy, "the finest example of a ballplayer, sportsman and citizen that baseball has ever known." Gary Cooper and Teresa Wright star. Advisory: A-1, TV-PG.

**TUESDAY, April 28, 5am**

**Jesus Living in Mary: The Consecration of St. Louis Marie de Montfort**

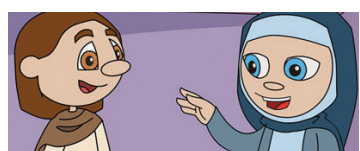
**EWTN** The late Montfort Father Patrick Gaffney hosted this EWTN-Arcadia Films docudrama about St. Louis Marie de Montfort (1673-1716). Shot in France, the film explains St. Louis Marie's deep Marian spirituality and his total consecration to Jesus through Mary.

**WEDNESDAY, April 29**

**John Paul II in America: Uniting a Continent**

**EWTN** At 8pm, Andrew Walther of the Knights of Columbus discusses the group's new documentary about Pope St. John Paul II (1920-2005). At 10pm, the film itself uses historic footage and interviews with Boston Cardinal Sean O'Malley, Supreme Knight Carl Anderson, author George Weigel and former Vatican spokesman Joaquín Navarro-Valls to describe the Holy Father's efforts to unite the Americas under Our Lady of Guadalupe.

**FRIDAY, May 1, 4:30pm**



**We Are Catholic**

**EWTN** In this episode, "Redemptive Suffering," children discover that suffering has value when we unite it with Christ's suffering and offer it up to God. TV-Y (okay for little ones).

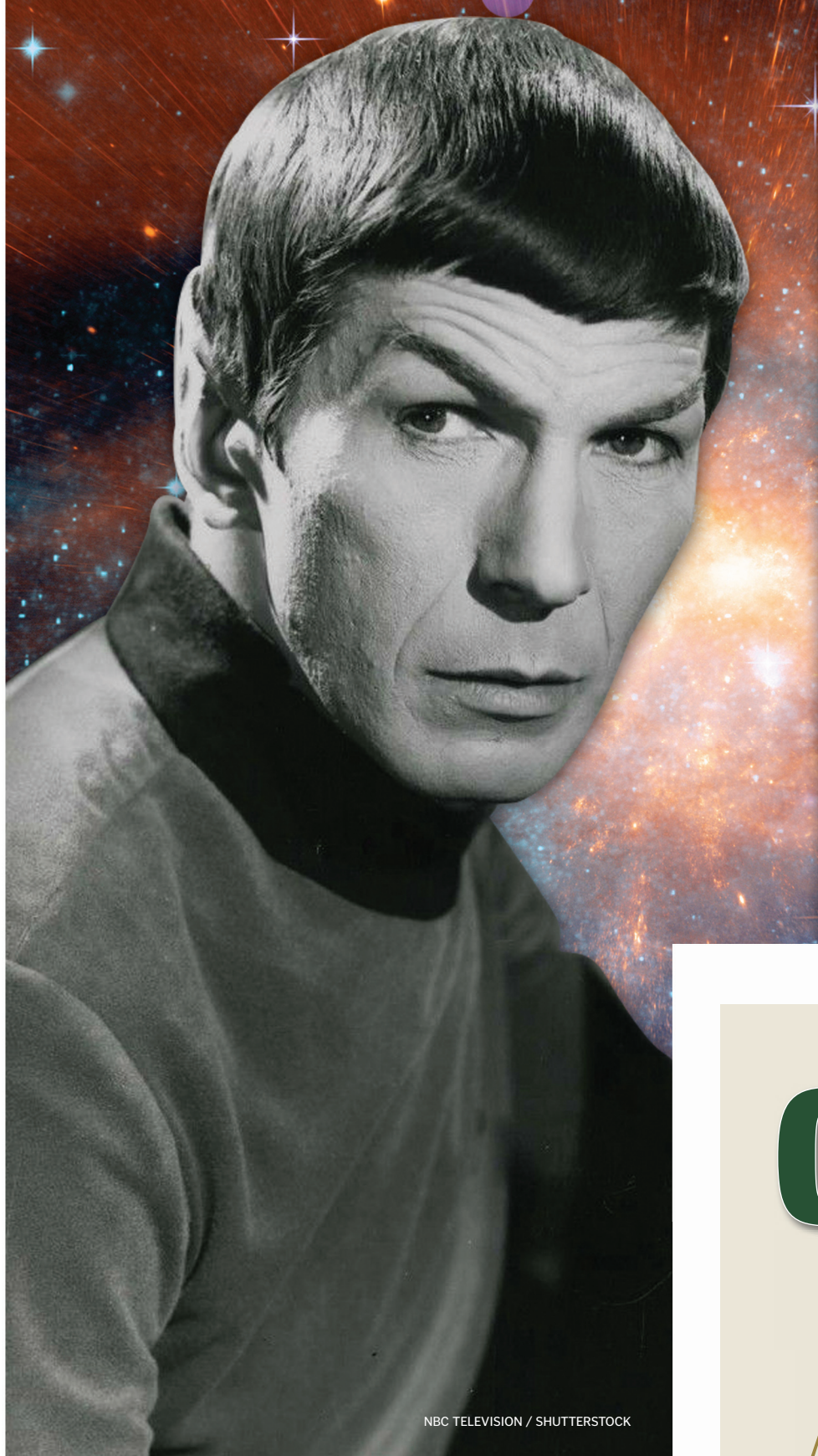
**SATURDAY, May 2, 5pm, live**

**Kentucky Derby**

**NBC** The 141st running of the Kentucky Derby, a 1 1/4-mile race for three-year-old thoroughbreds, will take place at historic Churchill Downs in Louisville, Ky. Post time will be 6:25pm.

Dan Engler writes from Santa Barbara, California.

## WHY STAR TREK — AND MR. SPOCK — MATTERS



NBC TELEVISION / SHUTTERSTOCK

### Reflections Following the Death of Leonard Nimoy

BY STEVEN D. GREYDANUS

I think my earliest memory of *Star Trek* is of a rerun of "Arena" — the original series episode pitting William Shatner's Capt. James T. Kirk against a hissing, reptilian alien captain of a race called the Gorn.

"Arena" was about more than going toe-to-toe with a menacing adversary in a dragon mask. It was ultimately about the power of technology — not just the now-quaintly futuristic technology of creator Gene Roddenberry's 23rd century, but about the technological leaps that got us there. Specifically, it was about the discovery of gunpowder.

"Arena" was also about a moral leap — the leap from self-interest and concern for one's kin and clan to universal empathy and compassion. "By sparing your helpless enemy who surely would have destroyed you," Kirk is told by a super-powerful alien sitting in judgment, "you demonstrated the advanced trait of mercy — something we hardly expected. We feel there may be hope for your kind."

Among the central characters, it was Leonard Nimoy's Mr. Spock who most embodied the show's "Trekkiness." Kirk

was a two-fisted, lady-killing hero who in many respects could have been at home in a Western. Spock was a less familiar sort of hero: aloofly cerebral, dignified, scientifically minded, seemingly emotionless. Kirk was the kind of alpha male who might well shoot for the stars, but Spock represented a class of technocrat who would make such voyages feasible.

*Star Trek* as a whole promoted techno-optimism and wound up instilling countless fans with a love of science, space and technology, not to mention inspiring a number of real-world inventions — but Spock in particular helped make being a scientist, along with being smart and calmly rational, cool for countless Americans.

It is hard to overstate the cultural impact of *Star Trek*. I don't mean to gloss over the limitations of the original series and of most subsequent expansions of the *Star Trek* universe. Philip J. Fry of *Futurama*'s succinct summary of the show — "79 episodes, about 30 good ones" — is pretty much on the money. Still, *Star Trek* changed everything, or at least it contributed in a mighty and enduring way.

CONTINUES ON PAGE B4

## Home Video Picks & Passes

By Steven D. Greydanus

**Odd Man Out** (1947) **Sullivan's Travels** (1941)

A pair of Scripture-quoting 1940s classics — an American comedy and a British film noir — by two great directors have been newly restored in high definition for lavish new Criterion "special edition" Blu-rays with lots of extras.

The British noir is **Odd Man Out** from Carol Reed, whose two best-known films are each from stories by Catholic novelists (the other is *The Third Man*, written by Graham Greene).

Set in Northern Ireland during The Troubles, *Odd Man Out* is adapted from the 1945 novel by English-Catholic novelist F. L. Green, who had an Irish wife. James Mason stars as Johnnie McQueen, a leader of a revolutionary underground group never named as the IRA, in a coastal city never named as Belfast (where exterior shots were filmed). Wounded and wanted for murder after a payroll robbery gone wrong, Johnnie wanders the city at night amid a largely oblivious populace, with a few who seek to help him or would profit from him. Johnnie's growing opposition to violence culminates in a vision of the kindly old priest whose lessons Johnnie says he and his fellows never really heard. The import of 1 Corinthians 13, which

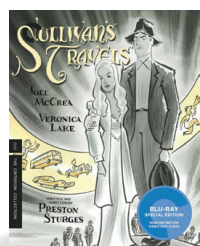
Johnnie passionately quotes, may have come too late in his case.

The American comedy is Preston Sturges' **Sullivan's Travels**, a celebrated screwball comedy with elements of melodrama and pathos. The renowned opening scene pits an idealistic young director named John Sullivan (Joel McCrea) who wants to make socially important films against a pair of studio suits who want him to keep making crowd-pleasing comedies.

The suits' best argument — that silver-spoon Sullivan doesn't know enough about hardship to address it — backfires when Sullivan decides to hit the road with 10 cents in his pocket in an effort to experience hardship firsthand.

Sturges said later that the film reflected his belief in "leaving preaching to the preachers"; ironically, the film includes a respectful scene in a black Baptist church, where a deep-voiced preacher quotes John 8:7 and leads the congregation in singing *Go Down, Moses*.

**Caveat Spectator:** *Odd Man Out*: Stylized violence, including an effective suicide. Mature viewing. *Sullivan's Travels*: Some slapstick and restrained violence; mild sexual references; a clearly invalid back-story marriage that is later dissolved. Teens and up.



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## Nimoy

CONTINUING PAGE B3 STORY

In the portrait of the utopian Federation, *Star Trek* showed us Roddenberry’s vision of what mankind should aspire to be. A picture is worth a thousand words, and one key aspect of Roddenberry’s vision of the future was right there on the bridge of the *Enterprise*, with all-American Kirk flanked by a black female communications officer, an Asian helmsman and, later, a young Russian ensign. In the midst of the Cold War, the civil-rights movement and second-wave feminism, these were powerful statements.

Most exotic of all was the science officer, Spock, whom a recent NPR story calls “otherness personified.” Complicating the picture, Spock wasn’t simply alien; he was half Vulcan, half human, opening the door to a variety of themes: reason vs. emotion; nature vs. nurture; racial and cultural mixed heritages. Precisely by denying his emotions, Spock affirmed their importance, at least for us.

Roddenberry’s overarching vision was broadly humanist, a term often used synonymously with “secular humanist.” Roddenberry was a secular humanist with a dim view of religion, but *Trek*’s humanism, while largely secular, was often compatible with the historic Christian humanism of St. Thomas More and Erasmus.

*Star Trek* affirmed the equality and dignity of all people, extending this to nonhuman peoples of every hue and description the makeup department could supply. Fear of the unknown or alien was rejected in favor of curiosity and openness to all.

The show was also humanistic in its affinity for the humanities. Shakespeare cropped up frequently on the original series, perhaps most strikingly in a staging of *Macbeth* on the *Enterprise* in the original series episode “The Conscience of the King.” Other sources of literary references include classical antiquity and the Bible.

Despite Roddenberry’s secularism, *Star Trek*’s record on religion is not simply negative, but mixed.



DAN HOLM / SHUTTERSTOCK.COM

Even in the original series there were positive religious elements, and after Roddenberry died, show runners took the ongoing franchise toward what I would argue is a more humanistic view of religion as a fundamental part of human experience.

An episode co-written by Roddenberry depicts a near-parallel Earth with a version of ancient Rome that enslaves peaceful dissidents who apparently call themselves “children of the Sun.” In the end, Uhura realizes that they had misunderstood: “Don’t you understand? It’s not the sun up in the sky. It’s the Son of God.” In this parallel Roman Empire, apparently, a parallel Christianity has arisen, enduring persecution there, as it did here.

As the franchise developed, Spock was a key element in the *Trekverse*’s growing openness to spirituality and religion. Spock’s “otherness” included a certain mysticism, perhaps linked to an Asian vibe present even in the original series and much more in later versions.

The feature films upped the ante considerably on Vulcan spirituality. In the Nimoy-directed *Star Trek III: The Search for Spock*, we learn that before dying in the previous film, Spock imparted his *katra* — his spirit or soul — to McCoy, so that his spirit could be brought to Vulcan and find rest.

The spinoff series went a long way toward complicating Roddenberry’s naive future, taking the vagaries of human nature, politics

and conflict in a more realistic direction. An increasingly frank acceptance of religion, especially Bajoran and Klingon religion, became an important theme. In time, it was even possible for a character to mention attending Mass at St. Peter’s in Rome!

The ongoing cultural influence of the *Star Trek* phenomenon is incalculable, and Leonard Nimoy’s contributions are an immense part of that. Nimoy wasn’t just an actor doing a job; in a real sense, he was a co-creator who helped to define his character in many ways.

His Jewish heritage gave him an experience of “otherness” to draw on, even before the pointed ears and arched eyebrows went on. Among other things, Nimoy famously adapted the Vulcan salute from a liturgical gesture used during the Jewish priestly blessing he spied in synagogue growing up.

It’s remarkable how real and important Nimoy made this fictional character for so many of us. “I have been, and ever shall be, your friend,” Spock said to Kirk in that unforgettable death scene at the climax of *The Wrath of Khan*. Many feel that we have indeed lost a friend. McCoy’s line, “He’s not really dead as long as we remember him,” rings hollow. I prefer to hope, and pray, to see him as no one ever has — not Spock, but Nimoy — in the great sequel to which this world is only a poor pilot episode.

Steven D. Greydanus is the *Register*’s film critic. He is the creator of *Decent Films*.

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# ARTS & Entertainment

## TV Picks

Nov. 29-Dec. 12

All Times Eastern

By Daniel J. Engler

**SUNDAY-MONDAY, Nov. 29-30**

**Apostolic Voyage to Kenya, Uganda, Central African Republic**

**EWTN** On Sunday, the Pope will leave Entebbe, Uganda, and fly to Bangui, Central African Republic. He will meet civil officials and the diplomatic corps, visit refugees, meet bishops and evangelicals, open the holy door of the cathedral of Bangui for the Year of Mercy, celebrate Mass and hear confessions at the start of a prayer vigil. On Monday, he is to visit a mosque, celebrate Mass in a stadium and say farewell. See EWTN.com for latest times.

**MONDAY, Nov. 30, 9pm**



**A Charlie Brown Christmas**

**ABC** This animated special from 1965 features Charles Schulz's "Peanuts" characters. "That's what Christmas is all about, Charlie Brown," says Linus, after reciting St. Luke 2:8-14, the angels' announcing the birth of Baby Jesus to the shepherds.

**SATURDAY, Dec. 5, 9:30am**

**Nicholas, the Boy Who Became Santa**

**EWTN** This animated feature from CCC's "Saints and Heroes" series tells the fact-based story of the real "Santa Claus," St. Nicholas of Myra (270-343), a bishop who endured persecution for the faith and whose great generosity made him universally beloved.

**TUESDAY, Dec. 8**

**Feast of the Immaculate Conception**

**EWTN** At 3:30am, Pope Francis will say **Holy Mass for the Opening of the Holy Door of St. Peter's Basilica.** (Re-airs 3pm.) At 8am, **Solemn Mass** in Ironton, Ala., will be celebrated. (Re-airs 6:30pm.) At noon, **Solemn Mass** will be said at the Basilica of the National Shrine of the Immaculate Conception. (Re-airs midnight.)

**THURSDAY, Dec. 10, 8pm**

**Toy Story 20th Anniversary**

**ABC** At 8pm, the **Toy Story 20th Anniversary Special** will interview Pixar Animation Studios employees who helped make the beloved 1995 comedy, in which toys come alive when people are not around. At 9pm, **Toy Story** itself airs.

**SATURDAY, Dec. 12, 3am, live**

**Mass in Honor of Our Lady of Guadalupe**

**EWTN** Archbishop José Gomez of Los Angeles will say Mass in the Cathedral of Our Lady of the Angels. Re-airs 3pm.

**SATURDAY, Dec. 12, 8pm**

**EWTN Cinema: 1531 – A Story That Is Not Finished Yet**

**EWTN** On the feast of Our Lady of Guadalupe, this documentary from Antonio and Laura Peláez uses dramatizations to tell the story of the Blessed Virgin Mary's appearances to St. Juan Diego outside Mexico City in 1531. Advisory: TV-PG.

**SATURDAY, Dec. 12, 8pm**

**It's a Wonderful Life**

**NBC** Director Frank Capra's values of "the love of people" and "the equal importance of each individual" permeate this Oscar-winning 1946 Christmas-themed drama about a despairing man whose perspective is changed when an angel shows him the meaning of his life. Jimmy Stewart and Donna Reed star.

*Dan Engler writes from Santa Barbara, California.*



**SPOTLIGHT TEAM.** Boston journalists confront the tragic issue of clerical sexual abuse in the new film named for them. Open Road Films

## Anatomy of a Cover-Up

*Spotlight* Aably Confronts a Tragic Chapter of Recent Church History

BY STEVEN D. GREYDANUS

In a crucial sequence in *Spotlight*, a victim of sexual abuse by a priest, telling his story to a *Boston Globe* reporter, says simply, "Then he molested me."

The reporter, Sacha Pfeiffer (Rachel McAdams), looks at him empathically. "I think language is going to be so important here," she prompts gently. "Just saying 'molested' isn't enough. People need to know what happened."

We cloak the monstrous in euphemisms. We call it "unspeakable" or "unthinkable" — designations that are accurate because in using them we make them so. In Catholic circles a dozen years ago, one sometimes heard about "The Crisis"; later it became "The Scandal." We all knew what these terms referred to, but did we really know?

Did we picture scenes like *Spotlight*'s queasy prologue: an assistant DA arriving at a police station, late at night, where a detained priest has been deferentially placed in the break room, the press sent away, while a bishop soothingly assures reeling family members that the offending cleric will be removed, and this will never, ever happen again? Did we think about how routinely such scenes played out in police stations for years and years?

"If it takes a village to raise a child," flamboyant lawyer Mitchell Garabedian (Stanley Tucci) says, "it takes a village to abuse one." That's not true, of course, but it may take a village to let the same abusers get away with it again and again.

If today we can scarcely imagine such a village — or such a "small town," as Cardinal Bernard Law (Len Cariou) ironically describes Boston at one point — *Spotlight* plunges us into the rhythms of a specific time and place: Boston around the turn of the millennium, at a time when cases of "pedophile priests" had been in the news for more than a decade, but the extent of the cover-up culture had not yet come to light.

Our window on this meticulously persuasive world is the *Globe's* Spotlight Team, a small unit of investigative journalists, led by low-key, matter-of-fact Walter "Robby" Robinson (Michael Keaton). Along with Pfeiffer, Robby's team includes breezy workaholic Michael Rezendes (Mark Ruffalo) and unassuming Matt Carroll (Brian d'Arcy James).

A certain fatalism hangs over early scenes, not in connection with any scandal, but because print is in decline. The *Globe's* website looks quaint and primitive by today's standards, but the writing is on the wall. New editor Marty Baron (a reserved Liev Schreiber), an outsider in multiple ways — a Jewish Floridian in Catholic Bos-

ton — wants to tweak the *Globe's* journalistic focus to strengthen its reader appeal, but the veterans are mainly concerned about layoffs.

Baron, the outsider, is the instigator for the investigation. When a story about a priest with a long list of abuse charges in several different parishes comes up, it registers as old news to Robby and his team, but Marty wants the bigger picture: something few in Boston were looking for. Presently there is a second name, then a third, and Rezendes in particular begins to suspect a pattern.

Rezendes is a lapsed Catholic with some animus against the Church; in fact, the whole Spotlight team were raised Catholic and are no longer practicing. From their perspective, amid the investigation that follows and the people they talk to, the portrait of the Church that emerges is almost unrelievedly negative.

We hear from an agitated Phil Saviano (Neal Huff), a member of SNAP (the Survivors Network of those Abused by Priests), and Richard Sipe (a voice on the phone, provided by an uncredited Richard Jenkins), a former Benedictine and mental-health counselor who opines that up to 6% of Catholic priests "act out sexually with minors."

Amid all this darkness, there is scarcely a scrap of comfort for Catholic viewers, other than two tidbits from the mid-1980s. In 1984, Boston Auxiliary Bishop John D'Arcy "broke ranks" and tried to persuade Cardinal Law to take notorious serial abuser Father John Geoghan out of full-time youth ministry; instead, it was Bishop D'Arcy who was transferred, to Fort Wayne-South Bend, Ind. In 1985, Dominican Father Thomas Doyle sent copies of a report he co-authored on the scope of the problem of clerical sexual abuse, calling it a billion-dollar liability, to every bishop in the United States. It was widely ignored.

Are there issues with this picture? Certainly. Characters perpetuate the common misuse of "pedophilia" in connection with abuse involving minors of any age; in fact, pedophilia, involving prepubescent children rather than adolescents or teenagers, is a small minority of all such crimes. Sipe's 6% figure — based on his clinical experience, not controlled studies — is apparently validated in Boston, though the 2004 John Jay Report found that, nationwide, from 1950 to 2002, about 4% of clergy had been accused, with four in five of these accusations substantiated.

*Spotlight* never mentions that rates of abuse among Catholic priests have not been found to be higher than among other clergy, in other professions such as school-teachers, or among the general pop-

ulation — or that rates of clerical abuse peaked in the 1970s, with sharp declines since then. And while end titles conclude with a long list of locations where scandals have occurred, there is no mention of the extensive measures the Church has undertaken in the last decade and a half to protect minors.

It would be easy for Catholics to seize on these and other issues and defensively dismiss the film as a hatchet job, but this would not be accurate or helpful. The film reflects the perspective of the Spotlight team; it offers a fundamentally negative view of Church leadership, one that is one-sidedly grim but essentially credible.

A lapsed-Catholic sensibility pervades the film: one that is rightly angry, but also laced with sadness and loss. In a revelatory moment, a conflicted, angry Rezendes wonderingly admits that for all his issues with the Church, he had always held onto the idea that someday he might go back. No more, alas.

Perhaps the most striking dimension of the film's polemic is that it isn't all directed at the Church. Church leaders are charged with manipulating the system, but the system is larger than the hierarchy. Lawyers, law enforcement, family members and friends and, pointedly and repeatedly, the fourth estate itself — the press, and specifically the *Globe* — are all implicated. "There's a fair share of blame to go around," Baron concludes judiciously in a thematically important speech as it becomes clear just how much was missed, and for how long, and by whom.

We say that the scandal is essentially a thing of the past, and it's true that important progress has been made. But it's perilously easy to implement programs without really confronting underlying cultural issues that made the scandal possible.

Catholic writer Russell Shaw, former communications director for the U.S. bishops, argues in his 2008 book *Nothing to Hide: Secrecy, Communication and the Catholic Church* that entrenched habits of secrecy, rather than transparency, concern for appearances over accountability, spin and happy talk are not cast off in a day and can be as damaging to the Church's mission as the scandals they foster.

*Spotlight* confronts us in a new way with the disastrous consequences of patterns of denial and deception. For Catholic viewers, clerical and lay, it can be seen as a dramatic witness to the profound need to expect and insist on far-reaching cultural change, on a culture of openness, transparency and accountability. The Church is called to be the light of the world; we must not fear to turn a spotlight on ourselves.

*Steven D. Greydanus is the Register's film critic and creator of DecentFilms.com.*

*Full disclosure: Steven writes a weekly column for The Boston Globe website CruxNow.com.*

**Caveat Spectator:** Explicit accounts of sexual abuse and other sexually related dialogue (nothing shown); frequent profane, obscene and crude language; drug references. Mature viewing.

## Home Video Picks & Passes

By Steven D. Greydanus

**Shaun the Sheep Movie** (2015) **Shaun the Sheep: Season 1** (2007)

Parents, if you haven't met Shaun the Sheep, you don't know what you're missing.

From Aardman Animations, creators of Wallace & Gromit and *Chicken Run*, Shaun the Sheep is a stop-motion treasure for the whole family, witty enough for grown-ups yet simple enough for the youngest children.



Shaun got his start as a supporting character from the third Wallace & Gromit short, *A Close Shave*;

and in 2007, he became the star of a long-running, popular BBC series. This year, he hit the big screen in the **Shaun the Sheep Movie**, this summer's second-best animated family film (after *Inside Out*, of course). You can also pick up a new boxed edition of **Shaun the Sheep: Season 1** for under \$10.

The premise of Shaun's world is simple. Shaun is an unusually bright sheep who belongs to a small flock on a sheep farm somewhere in the north of England. Other farm residents include a tolerant farm dog named Bitzer, who tries to keep order, a trio of mischievous pigs, a stereotypically nasty housecat and a dim-witted, near-sighted farmer.

The running gag is that while Shaun and his mates get into all kinds of un-sheep-like escapades, Bitzer alternates between trying to keep order and colluding with Shaun to make sure the farmer notices nothing untoward. Silliness ensues.

The great creative twist of Shaun's adventures is that they are related without dialogue, like latter-day silent films. The sheep bleat, the dog grunts and yowls, the Farmer mumbles, but the stories are told visually, which for some reason makes all the jokes funnier. Kids love this. A 4-year-old can follow *Shaun the Sheep*.

Shaun's small-screen escapades unfold in seven-minute episodes, with Shaun and his mates playing soccer, going out for pizza, swimming and confronting extra-terrestrials.

*Shaun the Sheep Movie* takes the sheep, along with the Farmer and Bitzer, off the sheep farm and into the big city, where the Farmer goes missing and his animals try to find him — while also avoiding a sinister animal-control officer.

There's a playful, warm-hearted exuberance to the film. It's not a masterpiece, but it is a film that has been loved over, with none of the faintly desperate, money-grabbing floundering of *Penguins of Madagascar* or *Minions*. Great fun.

**Caveat Spectator:** Shaun the Sheep Movie and Season 1: Mild rude humor and menace. Fine family viewing.

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