

The Faint Image Of The Chaplain In Twentieth Century Combat Films

Chaplain (MAJ) Terry Lindvall

On May 28, 1948, the United States Post Office issued a commemorative stamp of "The Four Chaplains." The stamp paid quiet tribute to four chaplains of different faiths: George L. Fox, Methodist; Alexander D. Goode, Jewish; Clark V. Poling, Dutch Reformed Church; and John P. Washington, Roman Catholic, who sacrificed their lives for their men in 1943 when their troop transport, the *S.S. Dorchester*, was torpedoed. The final image of the four chaplains praying together as the ship sank, their arms linked, has been emblazoned and immortalized in the history of the chaplaincy.

But other images of the American Military chaplain persist. Before Father Mulcahy of television's *M*A*S*H**, and simultaneous with the intermittent cameos of chaplains in the comic strips of Bill Mauldin, Mort Walker, and Sgt. George Baker, the movies have caricatured, honored and subverted the American perception of the chaplaincy.¹ This paper investigates several dominant images of the military chaplain as seen through four decades of cinema.

¹ The comic strip image of chaplains is clearly visible in Bill Mauldin's "Willie and Joe," Sgt. George Baker's "Sad Sack," and Mort Walker's "Beetle Bailey." Jerry Dumas, an assistant of Walker, had been a chaplain's assistant in the Army and inspired the Chaplain Staneglass character.



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Onward Christian Soldiers Marching As To War (1940-1943)

Before World War II began, America, torn between isolationists and interventionists, struggled with her conscience, wrestling over the apparent conflict of war and religion. How could a Christian nation fight and kill? With respected national heroes like Charles Lindbergh preaching peace, much of the pre-war era was characterized by isolationist tendencies.

Hollywood films highlighted this moral tension by bringing together an apparent oxymoron: the military chaplain. Through the religious soldier generally, and the military chaplain in particular, Hollywood found a way to address the issue and justify America's involvement in the European war. Several films prepared America for war by bringing together God and the military. One such film that established an early prototype for the army chaplain was "The Fighting 69th."

"The Fighting 69th" was the top money-making film for Warner Brothers in 1940. It dramatized the story of New York's famous WWI regiment of "The Fighting Irish." The presence of the chaplain in the unit bestows a divine blessing upon the American fighting man as "sure proof that God is on our side."

The autobiography of a real life priest, *Father Duffy's Story* (1919) provided the story and the model for subsequent tough, understanding men of God. Father Duffy, a former football hero, became the chaplain of the Rainbow Division, and essentially the star of "The Fighting 69th."

Chaplain Duffy, played by All-American Pat O'Brien, is an active priest, ready for war. When members of his regiment get buried alive under debris from a German bombing, Duffy bravely tunnels down to perform last rites. When James Cagney, playing an obnoxious but cowardly outsider who joined the group, gets into trouble, the chaplain takes him under his wing. Laying his hand on his shoulder, Duffy, as the ideal chaplain, reproves, encourages, and guides him into courageous and sacrificial action.

The film is ultimately about the chaplain, Father Duffy. His presence in war validates America's role in the new war brewing over there. "*The Fighting 69th*" includes a great deal of praying and discussing of religion and god. The film ends with a monument, a statue of Father Duffy, commemorating all the wars he fought in (Spanish-American, Mexican Border wars, World War I.) The film's finale is a pious and prayerful homily by the chaplain, in which he calls his men and American movie audiences to remember "the lost generation" who sacrificed their lives "that an ideal might live. Don't let it be forgotten, America. Be a citadel of peace, peace forever more, this I beg of you."

Director Howard Hawks brought religion and war together in his 1941 Academy Award winner, "Sergeant York," starring Gary Cooper. While Americans were still divided about becoming involved in the impending war, Warner Brothers produced the story of Tennessee hillbilly, Alvin York. In 1918, York, an avowed pacifist, had singlehandedly captured 132 Germans.

In the film version of York's story, while traveling on horseback to kill an enemy, York is literally jolted from his saddle by lightning, experiencing a Damascus-like conversion. The shocking encounter transforms him into a literal Bible believer. Thus when he reads "Thou shalt not kill," he believes it. The film doesn't need to introduce chaplains. Sgt. York stands as a model Christian soldier who puts his trust in The Book.

Against the hymnal backdrop of "When the Roll is Called Up Yonder," "Sweet Bye and Bye," and "Give Me That Old Time Religion," York struggles with either obeying God or defending his country. The crisis is resolved simply when York understands that some things are rendered to Caesar and some to God. Obviously, defending one's country and killing belong to Caesar. Hawks' film, dedicated to a day when "man will live in peace on earth" took the religious man and His Lord into war.

1943 saw the first major wave of WWII combat movies. Captain W. A. Le Francois' eyewitness account of the 2nd Marine Raider Battalion's assault on the Japanese-held Makin Island was turned into a stirring, action-packed combat movie that propagated overtly what Sgt. York suggested. One of the characters in "Gung Ho" proudly asserts: "The Lord fights on the side of the right."

"Gung Ho" was a paean of propaganda for teamwork and harmony, even using the allied Chinese term for its title. We get an idea of the nature and place of the chaplain when the film begins dramatically with the recruitment and training of the group team of killer marines. One of the men who applies to this elite corps—whose objective is "kill the enemy"—is John Harbison (Alan Curtis) who presents himself to Colonel Thornwald (Randolph Scott).

Harbison: I'm an ordained minister of the Gospel. When I left theological college I entered the marines instead of seeking a church because I felt that in times like these I can do more good here. I want the most dangerous post where men will need me the most.

Thornwald: We got our chaplains. What we want now is killers.

Harbison: I'll do my duty, sir.

Thornwald: I believe you will, Harbison.

The call to fight in "Gung Ho" becomes a specialized call of ministry for Harbison. The film does not denigrate the role of the chaplain; it recognizes its importance, however secondary. What is significant about this exchange, though, is the awareness that chaplains are a present part of the fighting team.

Ironically, Harbison's theological training leads to his death. Early in the film, Harbison is seen as a tough, insightful soldier, but he does exhibit a trust toward his fellow man. When he believes several of the enemy are surrendering in good faith, he approaches them—only to be shot down. He dies, praying, "Thy will be done, on earth as it is" To trust your enemy in the midst of battle is not a pragmatic action.

Another clergyman leaves his pulpit in Lewis Milestone's "Edge of Darkness" (1943). Errol Flynn plays a Lutheran minister who joins the Norwegian resistance movement, fighting for his homeland from the church tower with a machine gun. The religious and moral significance of killing the Nazi enemy from the spire of God's house is underscored by the music of "A Mighty Fortress is Our God."

The submarine in "Destination: Tokyo" (1943) does not contain a chaplain, but it does offer spiritual father figures. The captain of the *U.S.S. Copperfin* (Cary Grant) exudes what Bernard Dick calls "a sacerdotal aura." The captain serves as "a skipper-priest" with a sailor-flock. As a result, the whole crew of the *Copperfin* seems to be Christian: Everyone knows the Lord's Prayer and can sing "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear." And since apparently only Christians die at sea, the skipper beseeches "Christ Jesus, our Lord" to grant the departed eternal rest."²

Religious values are reaffirmed through older men when chaplains are not available. An older father figure, Mike, in "Destination: Tokyo" teaches "the kid," Tommy, not only about submarine life but about prayer and religious faith as well. The religious heritage of America is handed down from generation to generation even during crises.

Like "Destination: Tokyo," "Bataan" (1943) is marked by men who pray and who die. "Bataan" is the classic film of the WWII combat genre and presents a brutal and unblinking portrait of heroic Americans in a courageous, but doomed "last stand." Thirteen heterogeneous military men of assorted race, creed and color, symbolizing the American melting pot, "stayed the wave of barbarian conquest" as they tried to buy time for MacArthur. Included in the group are Irish and Latin Catholics, Jews, as well as both black and white Protestants. The black demolition expert, Epps, declared that he was studying to be a preacher back home before the war started.

² Bernard F. Dick, *The Star Spangled Screen: The American World War II Film*. (Lexington: The University Press of Kentucky, 1985), p. 129.

When the captain dies, Epps prays at a makeshift burial service.

Heavenly Father, Captain Lassiter was our Captain. And he was a good Captain (We know) what comes out of graves is the best that goes into them. Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. Amen.

When another soldier, Ramirez (Desi Arnez), becomes delirious with malaria, he talks incoherently in Spanish to the Sergeant Bill Dane (Robert Taylor) and then addresses him as his priest, reciting the Confiteor in Latin.

Ramirez: Father Manuel, Father Manuel
Sgt. Dane: Take it easy, soldier
Ramirez: Si, Padre, si Yes I remember. I
 learned it by heart, just like you
 said I confess I have sinned most
 exceedingly by thought, word and deed,
 through my fault, through my fault,
 through my most grievous fault.

While the heart felt prayers of Ramirez and Epps are poignant and emotionally wrenching moments in "Bataan," they are also the prayers of young, ordinary, and ethnic men. The prayers of a professional man, a chaplain, are heard in "Guadalcanal Diary" (1943).

The first character introduced in the filmed version of journalist Richard Tregaskis' dispatches is the chaplain, Father Donnelly (Preston Foster). This wise, engaging, and ubiquitous chaplain is the heart and soul of the first dispatchment of marines who landed on Guadalcanal.

With organ strains playing "Rock of Ages," Father Donnelly is described as a two-year All-American fullback from Notre Dame as he conducts a Roman Catholic Mass on a troopship "somewhere in the South Pacific." The ecumenical nature of the military is celebrated as one Marine compliments a Jewish comrade, Sammy Klein, on his signing of the Protestant hymn.

Soldier: Hey Sam, your voice is okay.
Klein: Why not? My dad was a cantor in the
 synagogue.

The chaplain binds his religiously diverse men together. Donnelly is father to them all, Catholic, Protestant and Jewish. He guides, exhorts, and leads them, and refuses to desert them. When the commander suggests that perhaps he shouldn't go with the first wave, Donnelly responds that he wishes to go "where I'll be needed most."

Donnelly teases the men and cares for them. After telling the

marines about the natives on the island, the good priest exhibits playful humor with "Taxi" Potts from Brooklyn (William Bendix).

Potts: (Are they) cannibals?
Chaplain: No, strictly vegetarians. Of course, they've never tasted marine meat
Don't worry, perhaps we'll land on Friday.

Donnelly dances an Irish jig with the troops; he hands out his copies of *Time Magazines* after mail call; he discovers a bicycle on the island and rides it merrily about the soldiers. When one man discovers limes on the island, he wishes aloud, in the presence of the chaplain, for cherries, ice and a gallon of gin. Then he addresses the chaplain.

Soldier: You know, I'm just kidding Padre.
Chaplain: But if you find those ingredients, stop around.

He is ever-present in time of danger and tragedy. When an enemy sniper kills a marine, he accompanies the medic into the firing line to give last rites. After one particularly rough night of war, he praises the bravery of the doctors who remained in the vulnerable hospital tent while bombs exploded all about. A sergeant quizzed him on his knowledge of seeing such courage.

Sgt.: How do you know, Padre? Were you there?
Chaplain: Well, naturally. I had to stay.

His devotion to his troops also enables him to teach them combat safety as well as more ordinary catechisms. When one young troop gets a concussion during a bombing raid, Donnelly instructs him on precautions "Don't bury in so deep," he tells him. "Next time, just cushion yourself with your elbows."

Les and Barbara Keyser called this giant Irish Catholic priest "a drill instructor of the soul." Such an "heroic padre became a leading icon in Second World War films; his most stirring scenes usually involved reading the Lord's Prayer over graves or leading unseasoned young recruits to military victories and spiritual maturity."³ Donnelly does conduct memorial services and leads men in prayers. In one of "Guadalcanal Diary's" most tender and touching

³ Les and Barbara Keyser, *Hollywood and the Catholic Church* (Chicago: Loyola University Press, 1984), p. 163.

scenes, "Taxi" Potts publicly confesses his faith and his foxhole theology.

- Potts: Father, you got any objections if I say what I'm thinking?
- Chaplain: Go ahead son, don't mind me.
- Potts: Well this thing is over my head. It's gonna take something bigger than me to handle it . . . I ain't much on this praying business, you know, the Lord's Prayer and things like that. My old lady usually handled that stuff.
- Sgt.: Yeah, I used to pray: Lord, give me this; Lord, give me that. Please let the Yanks win.
- Potts: Me, well, I'm no hero; I'm just a guy. I came out here because somebody had to. I don't want no medals. I just want to get this thing over with and go back home. I'm just like everybody else and I'm telling you I don't like it; except maybe there's nothin' I can do about it. It's up to somebody bigger than me, bigger than anybody else What I mean is I guess it's up to God If we get it—and it sure looks that now—I hope He figures we did the best we could and lets it go at that Maybe it's a funny kind of prayer but it's what I'm thinking.

After a brief moment of silence, Donnelly marks this awkward petition with an affirming "Amen." Patience, wisdom, understanding, courage, humor, human compassion, and spiritual guidance mask Donnelly and the image of the Chaplain during these perilous days of the war. However, as the war plodded towards victory, the godly chaplain slipped out of view. Trained men of God were replaced by God's ordinary men. The chaplain became a shadow, appearing briefly and fainting on the edges of the screen as his surrogates took over.

Surrogates And Shadows (1944-1949)

In her book, *Visions of Way*, Kathryn Kane noted that the WW II combat films shifted "from adamant insistence on American superiority and moral purpose of war to, by 1945, greater emphasis on futility and suffering, and a silence or obvious unease on the matter

of justification.”⁴ The optimistic religious values shared by the men in the military waned as God did not give immediate victory. And as men came of age and experience, they lost both innocence and faith. Their trust in God was slowly and subtly replaced by a trust in military leadership. Chaplains were replaced by military leaders.

Near the end of the war John Wayne appears as the secular surrogate chaplain of his forces. As the gruff, self-willed boss of a construction crew, Wedge Donovan organizes his men into “The Fighting Seabees” (1944). He cries out at one point in desperation, “What, are my men expendable?” The question is answered in a film the following year.

In 1945, Wayne appears again in what has been called the gloomiest title of all combat pictures, “They Were Expendable.” After the opening credits, a superimposed title locates and dates this John Ford film: “Manila: In the Year of Our Lord, 1941.” The film almost ignores the Lord throughout the rest of the film, except for two troops making a speedy visit to a small cemetery with two crosses. Both quickly kneel and pray; one crosses himself. The scene lasts no longer than five seconds.

When Lt. Rusty Ryan (Wayne) arrives with dead comrades in a small village, he finds a local Roman Catholic church. The Father, however, has been gone to a distant hospital for two days. Ryan recruits two little Filipino altar boys and conducts the memorial service himself. Lacking priest and chaplain, Ryan, with his voice cracking, substitutes a recitation of Stevenson’s “Requiem,” (“Gladly did I live and gladly die,”) for normal religious texts. He eulogizes his men in a remarkably nonreligious service: “Just a couple of blue jackets who did their job and did it well.” The film crescendoes with an emotional rendering of “The Battle Hymn of the Republic.” The choral prophecy that “Our God is Marching On” is matched with the enscribed reminder that “We Shall Return.” God marches with us on our return.

If ever we thought God was not involved on our side, Father Big Mike arrived in 1945 in the most sanctimonious film of the war, “God is My Co-Pilot.”

When his B-17 bombing raid is cancelled, agnostic Colonel Robert Lee Scott, Jr., becomes so desperate he even prays to God: “I’ve never asked for anything. If it’s Your will, please let me go with them, just this one time.” He receives an immediate and affirmative answer. God, it seems, wastes no time when the enemy needs to be killed. Scott’s religious doubts are answered by Father Mike, missionary to the Chinese and God’s personal military strategist and apologist. In one particular pep talk, Father Mike defines his religious duty in military terms.

⁴ Kathryn Kane, *Visions of War: Hollywood Combat Films of World War II*. (Ann Arbor, Michigan: UMI Research Press, 1982), p. 145.

- Col. Scott: You sound more like a soldier than a missionary.
- Father Mike: I guess there's not much difference, only in the weapons. We both fight the forces of evil and take the same chances.
- Col. Scott: I guess you're right. I've never thought about it that way before. But I'm not exactly a religious guy.

Later the Georgian pilot confesses that having killed innumerable men, he worries about the aftermath of the war. The notion of a chaplain as one who dispenses bromides and platitudes evolves out of Father Mike's response.

- Scott: Will we be hard and bitter and burned out inside? And will life be the same meaningless thing it is out there?
- Mike: You're confused, Scotty. Life is always cheap in a war, yes, but neither life nor death are ever meaningless. And a man only changes for the worst when he thinks they are.

Father Mike is Scott's spiritual guide and teacher. He is the kind of chaplain public relation officers and recruiting brochures describe in glowing terms. Yet even in this propaganda film, Mike's truisms, however trite, communicated effectively with the post-war audiences. After the public heard Father Mike recite Don Blanding's religious poem, "They Speak of God," the Warner Brothers studio was inundated with requests for copies of the poem. It soon became the text for scores of inspirational Sunday sermons.

In contrast to "God is My Co-Pilot," William Wellman's "Story of G. I. Joe" (1945) took the audience out of the skies and heavens and dumped them into the mud, muck and misery of war. While chaplains waned in significance as the success of the war appeared imminent, churches and prayers still filled the screen, if only as bleak ironic or cynical statements.

A major combat scene in "G. I. Joe" occurs when soldiers recapture a church held by the Nazis. After shooting a sniper hiding behind a statue of an angel, Sgt. Warnicki, a good Polish Catholic, removes his helmet and kneels to give thanks at the altar. Another sniper fires at him from the belfrey and is shot down by his buddy. Warnicki observes: "This is a funny place to be killing men in."

In the same film, a chaplain conducts a wedding in a bombed-out church, showing that even in the midst of death, life and love continue. However as soon as he has pronounced the couple

man and wife, bombs begin falling again. The chaplain concludes the ceremony shouting "Hit the dirt!"

By 1946 the chaplain begins to disappear from the combat film. "A Walk in the Sun," the story of the Texas Division hitting the beach at Salerno, includes only a faintly religious character. Windy (John Ireland) is a minister's son from Canton, Ohio, who spends his time mentally composing a record of the war to his sister back home.

As religious influences wane, the change is also marked musically. "The Battle Hymn of the Republic" is replaced here by Sousa's "Stars and Stripes Forever."

William Wyler's Academy Award winning film "The Best Years of Our Lives" deals with the return of WW II veterans who try to integrate themselves back into society. Significantly absent is the chaplain, whose counseling and care would seem fitting. Small talk about prayer and blessings from God are the only evidence of religion.

The chaplains that appear sound quite ecumenical, but are merely vague microphones for other causes. In the late 1940s certain films used chaplains as political, rather than spiritual prophets. As an example, Jeanine Basinger noted that in the 1949 film, "Battle-ground," we find "a propaganda message about Russia for the new cold war."⁵ The chaplain warns:

As the years go by, a lot of people are going to forget, but you won't. Don't let anybody tell you you were a sucker to fight in a war against Fascism. Let us each pray in his own way to our own God.

As the men move into combat, Isaiah's spiritual prophecy is transformed into a military metaphor. "They shall mount up with wings of eagles; they shall run and not be weary." Even scriptural imagery is appropriated for government use.

Other films of this era use the chaplain to justify war. In "Above and Beyond," the chaplain blesses the crew and sends them forth to use nuclear bombs over Hiroshima "in the name of Jesus."

The quintessential surrogate chaplain of this period is John Wayne. In "The Sands of Iwo Jima" (1949), he is shadowed by footage of real chaplains in action. John M. Stryker (Wayne) serving both as their commander and as their spiritual and emotional father leads a rifle squad of Marines. A glimpse of the relationship between traditional soldier and religion occurs early in the film after a wedding held in a community chapel. One marine remarks: "You know that's the first time I've been in a church since I was fourteen

⁵ Jeanine Basinger, *The World War II Combat Film: Anatomy of a Genre*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986), p. 162.

years old." Soldiers no longer need religious faith; now they have the chief leatherneck.

Chaplains do appear in quick, authentic cameos. After suffering numerous casualties in establishing a beachhead on the island of Tarawa, a reprieve for attending the wounded occurs. Several actual chaplains are shown caring for the injured and dying. As documentary rather than dramatic characters, they are uncomfortably real, though positively drawn, for a combat film. One chaplain offers a wounded soldier a cigarette and lights it for him.

Soldier:	How am I doing chaplain?
Chaplain:	God has been good to you my son; You're going home.

To a less fortunate soldier, a Spanish chaplain wearing vestments and a camouflaged helmet closes and wipes his eyes, reciting "Domino sit anima tua. Amen." Documentary footage follows during which a chaplain conducts a memorial service on shipboard, lowering a coffin draped with the American flag into the sea.

Stryker continues the ministry when the chaplains are not around. When a Jewish troop is hit by a sniper, the boy whispers a prayer: "Israel, Adoni, Eloheim." Stryker responds quietly: "Amen."

The film makes certain that we don't fully project too much spirituality on the macho Stryker. When he charitably helps an abandoned mother and her child, the woman tells him.

Woman:	You're a very good man.
Stryker:	You can get odds on that in the Marine Corps.
Woman:	So long Sergeant. I'll pray for you.
Stryker:	Let's not get religious.
Woman:	I'll pray for you Sergeant.
Stryker:	Good luck.

The last phrase seems to indicate a trend in war films that follow. The films generally would not get religious and luck, good luck, did become predominant.

The Luck Of The Good Guys (1950-1957)

Combat films, made in the prosperous Eisenhower years, tended to neglect the religious dimensions in favor of chance and fate. With a few notable exceptions, chaplains are dead or nonexistent. Such a trend can be seen when screenwriter James Edward Grant followed his "Sands of Iwo Jima" with Nicholas Ray's 1951 "Flying Leathernecks," also starring John Wayne. In it, fate and luck replace

faith and prayer. American men, now perceived as essentially good, no longer need God's help as much as a lucky break.

During a shelling, a soldier in a muddy foxhole clasps his hands, looks heavenward and prays. He is immediately blasted and presumably heads heavenward. One of his fellows comments: "He could have made it with a little luck." "Not with the luck we've had," says another.

When one of his pilots is shot down, Wayne broods that he has to write a letter to the boy's parents. A friend tells him: "You know those things should be left to the Chaplain. Let the Padre do it." Wayne responds: "He was killed today on the ridge with the infantry."

A Christmas record from home comes for another soldier in which his son tries to tell him goodnight, and ends up by reciting the Lord's prayer. It seems that prayers are for dead men and children. Everyone else awaits the roll of the dice by Somebody upstairs. The outcome of life and death and war become more dependent on Lady Luck and impersonal forces, as the chaplains die and fade away like old soldiers. Only in moments of quiet desperation do men turn to prayer.

Survivors from a destroyed submarine float on life rafts in "The Coral Sea" (1953). All other resources gone, in despair they pray: "Our Father, which art in heaven. Thy Kingdom come Thy will be done. Give us this day our daily bread." Foxhole religion occurs on the dark deadly waters, as well as in the trenches.

The film autobiography of Audie Murphy, "To Hell and Back" (1955), carries few religious references outside its title. As the 3rd Division prepares to launch an amphibious assault on hostile French shores, we see documentary footage of a priest in white vestments offering the Eucharist to both a white and black soldier. Other than this brief scene and one where Murphy seeks a wooden cross for a dead friend, religion is absent.

One film stands as an anomaly in a decade of films concerned with luck and fate. It is explicitly religious. Douglas Sirk's "Battle Hymn" (1957) begins with choir music of the "Battle Hymn of the Republic" over images of stained glass windows. The film chronicles the actual experiences of Colonel Dean Hess poignant and peculiar struggle between faith and fighting. Hess (Rock Hudson) is to become a "source of inspiration to fighting men;" "one man's capacity for good, an affirmation of the essential goodness of the human spirit."

"Killer" Hess suffers from guilt brought about by his WW II bombing of children in a German orphanage. When the Korean war begins, he is a minister; but more related to Lady MacBeth, with his "hands stained with innocent blood." He decides he must return to the service. When he is asked: "If you do go back, shouldn't it be as

a chaplain?" Hess answers: "I'm no good here. What use could I be to the wounded and dying?" He hides his ministerial vocation from his unit in Korea, even when one of his men fumbles through a Thanksgiving prayer.

Hess is paralleled by a black Christian soldier, Maples, who accidentally strafes civilians on one of his runs. Trying to bring advice and counsel, Hess comes upon Maples reading his Bible and says "I had a similar experience once." However it is the non-professional preacher, Maples, who assuages the guilt both men suffer.

Maples: Sir, I figure it's all God's making and will. Doesn't the Book say no sparrow shall fall to the earth unless He first gives His nod. He must have given His nod to what happened out there today. He must have. He is the Almighty, isn't He? No, we have to trust Him sir. How can we live without that? God and all His reasons are invisible to the eyes of man. Got to just take our next step; do our next chore.

Hess: Thank you, Maples, thank you.

Discovering that Hess the Major is a preacher, a cynical friend taunts him: "You weren't exactly the preacher type over in Germany. What happened? Too many free pamphlets on the street corner? Repent and be saved?"

Yet the former preacher, Hess, becomes the chaplain when his friend is dying. "I'm scared." the friend confesses.

Hess: Nothing to be afraid of.

Major: I don't know how to die. Say a prayer for me.

Hess: It's already been said. Don't be afraid. Think of life as a shadowy place. Think of a door beyond—when that door opens, we pass into a wonderful lightness. Just a gentle step and we pass from darkness to light.

Major: Thank you, Reverend.

In trying to bring peace to his dying friend, Hess discovers "for the first time, I felt like an instrument." From this inspirational surge of usefulness, Hess explains his arrival to wholeness more in psychological than religious terms. "Through the agony of war, by reaching beyond myself, I have found myself. The difference between the

impossible and the possible is a measure of man's will." (And then Maples sings "Swing Low, Sweet Chariot").

The key to "Battle Hymn" is the recognition that "good deeds are your purest prayers." Trying to get transport planes to fly 400 Korean orphans to a safe island, Hess meets an Oriental ivory statue maker outside a Buddhist temple. He tells Hess: "I am a Christian, you understand; but a house of God is for anyone."

The expectation of finding him a Buddhist priest is further shattered when he tells Hess to remember the words from *Matthew*: "Whosoever does to one of these little ones does unto me." The little statue maker also recognizes, intuitively and spiritually, that Hess is "a man of God."

En Soon Yang, the beautiful woman who cares for the orphans (and who could become an adulterous temptation for Hess if the film were not so sanctimonious) is killed before a rescue takes place. At her funeral, Hess cannot pray. Yet immediately after she is buried, five transport carriers arrive, showing "the Lord would provide . . . even through the U. S. Navy."

One other 1957 film extolled the virtues of the religious chaplain who seeks to serve others. Christian Scientist, King Vidor directed the second version of Hemingway's "A Farewell to Arms." This time, however, the military is not the Lord's instrument for the church. It is an obstacle.

Army orders demand the chaplain desert wounded and dying men. He refuses. In doing so, he prepares for his own martyrdom. An agnostic physician who must obey his military orders and leave the casualties finds a renewed respect for this man of faith, who chooses to stand steadfast in the face of the enemy and friends. A farewell to this chaplain in 1957 is a farewell to most religious references in combat films.

The Secular War (1957-1969)

In the 1960s religion is virtually nonexistent in war films. "The Battle of the Bulge" (1965) includes relaxed and careless strains of "O Tidings of Comfort and Joy" during a lull in the fighting, with troops in a front line bunker eagerly waiting to go home for Christmas. Then the Nazi offensive begins.

In the same film nuns appear from the ruins of an obliterated village asking for medical supplies to help the wounded in a church, but no other religious persons are present. When the German panzer division threatens, gutsy Major Kiley (Henry Fonda) talks about the weather. "If it lifts, the Germans will find us and our men and our tanks. I'm praying that the fog lifts." Prayers for weather by chaplains will become a dominant motif in "Patton," but in this film a prayer is no more than a wish.

The same year, 1965, John Wayne reappears as Captain Rock Torrey in Otto Preminger's *"In Harm's Way."* The only oblique religious symbols occur when he is called "The Rock of Ages" and when he tells his wayward associate (Kirk Douglas) to shave, and the response is: "Aye! Aye! Father Torrey."

The dominant motif in this film is that of luck. Men wish each other good luck. Admirals are told that "If there's any luck, you're going to need it."

"Midway" (1976) continues this concern with luck. Men have "bad luck," or "get lucky." The point of rendezvous for the American fleet is Point Luck. Sent to look for American carriers, pilots are told to "aim here and then just trust to luck." The final question of the Battle of Midway is: "Were we better than the Japanese or just luckier?"

In addition to these films, other films of the 60s offered a uniform contrast between the good guys and bad guys. "The Longest Day" (1962), "PT109" (1963), "The Dirty Dozen" (1967), and "The Green Berets" (1968) tended to show Americans as honorable and morally superior to a proud, ruthless, or treacherous enemy. Only one of these films, "The Longest Day," does acknowledge a Divine Sovereignty who exists beyond political and national boundaries. On the night before D-Day, an 82nd Airborne Colonel (John Wayne) walks into his commanding officer's office.

General:	Is it still raining?
Colonel:	On and off, off and on. Sometimes I wonder which side God is on.

The sentiment of this brief conversation is echoed on D-Day by a German general, who learns that the Panzers have not been released to him because the Fuhrer is sleeping and not to be disturbed: "I sometimes wonder whose side God is on." By and large, however, the films of the 1960's assume that if the Almighty is present, He is an ally of the Allies.

While "The Green Berets" does not show any chaplains in Viet Nam, it does manipulate religious images to indicate His presence and attitude toward America. As the Lord cares for widows and orphans, we meet Ham Chuck, a native orphan boy adopted by missionaries who "taught him pretty good English."

He is the symbolic victim of Southeast Asia. One soldier explains that "after his parents were killed he stayed with missionaries and learned English from them until they themselves were killed by the Cong." Thus those who care for him are fulfilling a divine commission.

John Wayne leads his berets ("God willing and the river don't rise.") again, as the spiritually-wise military leader. To cynical journalist David Jansen, he explains the psychology of one of his

men who must kill the enemy: "By the grace of God he comes out in one piece, but (he) carries guilt the rest of his life."

The pathos of these scenes argues for the necessity of American military action; they are justified in part because God and the Berets must struggle together in doing right in a morally murky situation.

God's approval of the Allied cause is most noticeably present in "The Longest Day." A division commander briefing the Pathfinders (the first invasion parachutists) dramatically tells his troops: "When you get to Normandy you will have only one friend—God." John Wayne orders his men to "send the enemy to hell." When Robert Mitchum is told to begin his troop movements, he intones: "God help us now."

In this film, chaplains appear in two very humorous scenes. What is significant, however, is that these lighthearted scenes bracket the most sobering segment of the film: the tragic fighting and sacrifice in St. Mere-Eglise, where paratroopers, dropped in the middle of the town, are massacred by the Germans as in a duck-shooting exhibition.

The scene immediately preceding presents British paratroopers who landed in a swampy area under intense fire. A soldier is startled by something gasping for air rising out of a pond. It is the chaplain. As bullets fly all around, he takes a deep breath and submerges again. When he rises again, a conversation begins.

- Soldier: Don't you think we should be moving on now?
- Chaplain: Go on my boy. I'll only be a moment." (Submerges, then reappears). I'm sorry I startled you. I'm looking for my communion set.
- Soldier: Your what? Now look, Padre, we've got no time for . . . (Chaplain submerges again.)
- Chaplain: I'm sure it was here when I lost it.
- Soldier: We're under fire Padre! Don't you think we ought to . . .
- Soldier: Go on my boy, go on. I'll only be a minute. (Submerges and finds communion set). Glory be! Now my son, let's go about God's business tonight.

This American chaplain appears just as oblivious to the war as the British chaplain in a following scene. Walking about in a dark forest, an obviously lost chaplain is clicking his ID clicker, sounding like a loud cricket in mating season. He clicks it several times, then moves

behind a tree and clicks again, and again, and again. Finally, the chaplain moves next to a bush and takes off his helmet. Frustrated, he gives three consecutive signals with his clicker. Suddenly, the bush stirs and reveals a camouflaged soldier.

Soldier: For God's sake, Padre, stop that damn noise.
Chaplain: I'm sorry son. I'm afraid I'm lost.
Soldier: Well, who ain't. Come on.

The chaplains here are portrayed affectionately, but also as the proverbial fish out of water. These men are not trained for war. Blind to the dangers of fighting, they are more concerned about not losing the religious and personal dimensions of the war, keeping the faith afloat, and establishing communication with the men. "The Longest Day" portrays the chaplains as men with sweet naiveté. They are not cowardly or incompetent as much as unaware of what war involves. But during this decade of the silence of God and His ambassadors, even comic chaplains are a welcome relief.

Holy Caricatures (1970)

The image of the chaplain in 1970 took a fascinating and complex twist. The chaplain often became less two-dimensional and more unique, and more controversial.

One particular film contained a caricature upon which all chaplains were to be teased, modeled, and mocked: Robert Altman's "M*A*S*H*" (1970). Altman's lacerating version of blacklisted screenwriter Ring Lardner Jr.'s black comedy was a sharp debunking of military chaplains.

It followed the broad war comedy of Stanley Kubrick's 1964 slapstick anti-war film, "Dr. Strangelove or How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb." Hawkish generals pray and invoke God's presence for their dastardly deeds. In a wry parody of "God is My Co-Pilot," as General Jack D. Ripper orders planes to blast the USSR, he intones: "God willing we will prevail . . . God bless you . . . don't forget to say your prayers"

When it appears all the planes are recalled, General Turgidson (George C. Scott) assumes spiritual as well as military leadership, communicating in turgid poetic phrases: "I think we should all just bow our heads and give a short prayer of thanks for our deliverance . . . Lord, we have heard the wings of the Angel of Death fluttering over our heads in the valley of fear."

When M*A*S*H appeared in 1970 it struck an anti-religious, anti-military chord in the hearts of American audiences. Roger Greenspun, reviewer for the *N.Y. Times* pointed out that

“M*A*S*H” was “the first major American movie openly to ridicule belief in God—no phony belief, real belief.”

The Keyzers point out that “Catholic director Altman’s “M*A*S*H” was especially hard on Catholics; it pictured their chaplains as totally ineffectual and bumbling.”⁶ When Father “Dago Red” (Rene Auberjonois) is introduced to Captain Hawkeye, his rosary beads get tangled in his hands. And he mutters, apologetically: “If you boys have any problems my tent is right over there.”

Befuddled and stupid, the chaplain is irrelevant to the field hospital unit, the Korean war, and the Army. Dago is consistently portrayed as an outsider observer, always peering in nervously. He enters the “M*A*S*H” operating tent during surgery, wandering aimlessly, meekly offering his services: “I’m here if you need me. Does anyone else need help?” He enters the tent, puts on his purple vestments and begins to perform last rites for a dead soldier. He is told to leave the dead alone and come hold a surgical clamp for a living, bleeding soldier. He apologizes, “Oh yes, . . . I’m sorry” and obeys weakly, ready to faint.

A central crisis of the film occurs when Painless, the Dentist, experiences a bout of impotence and decides to commit suicide. Dago draws Hawkeye into his confidence.

- Chaplain: Hawkeye, Hawkeye, could I speak to you outside? I have to talk to you outside. This will only take a moment. There’s a problem with Outski, the Dentist. It’s not my problem; it’s his problem. It’s difficult to talk about because I learned about his problem in confession. . . . I can’t divulge.
- Hawkeye: Can you give me a hint? Just an idea?
- Chaplain: No—but I can tell you how serious it is. He and the boys were playing poker and one of the boys turned to him and asked for a ruling on one of the hands and Walt said he said: “What does it matter? It’s only a game.”
- Hawkeye: Painless said it’s only a game? Poker’s only a game? (Whistles thoughtfully)
- Chaplain: Uh huh. That’s what I thought. (Fading) Thank you. I didn’t know what . . . to do. There are some things . . . see there are some things that absolution just can’t . . .

⁶ Keyser. *Op cit.* p. 188.

Later Hawkeye approaches the chaplain to help them conduct a fake farewell and last supper for the dentist. When Dago realizes he is being asked to give mock last rites for a suicide, he demurs.

Chaplain: Hawkeye, I really must . . . should check with the military vicar's office. I cannot give absolution to a man who is going to commit suicide. It's a mortal sin.

Hawkeye convinces him it's only an act and that if the trick works, there would be no suicide. The chaplain mumbles: "Well, I should check," but capitulates to doing what his sacrilegious buddies tell him to. The chaplain is not only irrelevant—he is weak and sadly pathetic. He compromises the only religious function that has any meaning among the dying for the sexual resurrection of one soldier.

Dago does contrast with the religious fanaticism of the horny, hypocritical Major Burns, another apt moniker. The bitter irony used against this officer who teaches a Korean houseboy how to read Psalm 23 and prays the Lord's Prayer publicly (like a Pharisee) is brutal and unrelenting.

While the image of Burns is satirically sharp, it is the bland, weak image of Chaplain Dago which persists, due in some part to the enduring presence of the M*A*S*H TV series. Burns exits the movie strapped in a straight-jacket. Chaplain Dago fades as a pathetic, ridiculous figure at the film's end, standing before a jeep and blessing it with a rich but aimless prayer.

O Lord God, listen favorably to our prayers. With your right hand bless this jeep. Send your holy angels so that all who ride in it may be delivered and guarded from danger. And as you granted faith and grace by your deacon Philip to the man from Ethiopia who was sitting in his chariot and reading holy scriptures, show the way of salvation to your servants so that helped by your grace and always intent on doing good works, they may, after all the trials of their pilgrimage and life on earth, attain to everlasting joys through Christ our Lord. Amen.

One of the broadest roles for a chaplain character occurs in Mike Nichols' adaptation of the Joseph Heller novel, "Catch-22" (1970). Anthony Perkins is Chaplain A. T. Tappman who continually reminds people, "You don't have to call me Father—I am Anabaptist." Nevertheless, everyone chooses to address him as Father or Padre, the stereotypical nickname for a chaplain. (Aren't all chaplains really celibate priests, anyway?)

Tappman first appears sitting quietly and patiently beside a bedridden, injured Yossarian (Alan Arkin), the protagonist of the

film. (Yossarian wants to be out of the war, but the only way out is to be certified insane. To want to be out of the war means you're sane and not crazy, so one is caught in a catch-22—a no-win situation.) Yossarian stirs from a sleep and looks up.

Chaplain: I asked how are you?
Yossarian: Oooh, better. Thank you. What about you?
Chaplain: Me? Fairly well, thank you. Except for a slight headcold. Had it for about a week and can't shake it. You must know what they're like.
Yossarian: No, can't say that I can.
Chaplain: Well, you're very lucky.
Yossarian: Yes, I suppose I am except for this piece of schrapnel I caught in my leg.
Chaplain: Yes . . . I've never caught a piece of schrapnel. Hmmm.
Yossarian: *You're* a chaplain!
Chaplain: Yes, didn't you know that?
Yossarian: No, I didn't. I've never really seen a chaplain before. I had no idea that a chaplain looked like that.
Chaplain: Well . . . Well if I can do anything to help you, anything at all, you . . .
Yossarian: Anything?
Chaplain: Like books . . . Or cigarettes . . . Toys?
Yossarian: No, No. I have everything I need. Thank you, very much. You could do nothing for me.
Chaplain: What?
Yossarian: Well if you could talk to Major Deluth.
Chaplain: The Squadron Commander?
Yossarian: (becoming hysterical) And tell him I don't want to fly anymore.
Chaplain: Well, he's a very difficult man, a difficult man to see. But it's not my business. But I'll see what I can do I really will. I'll do my best. (Mumbling, he stumbles away.)

Trying to help this soldier in trouble and need, the chaplain encounters a Lt. Colonel and the Colonel. The Lt. Col. overhears the Chaplain explaining how when he goes to see Major Major that "you can only see him when he's not there. When he's in, he's not there to be seen, except when he's out."

The Lt. Colonel (Buck Henry) answers: "What the hell you talking about father? Get your ass in, (this jeep) Padre. You describing some mystical experience you've had? Haven't had some ecstatic visions or anything like that? . . . Didn't see any burning bush, did you? Hear any voices or anything like that? I think we need to keep our supernatural episodes down to a minimum with a war to win and all that, if you get my meaning."

The chaplain's meeting with the Colonel is not much better. The Chaplain enters the office of the Colonel (Martin Balsam) who is sitting on the head. As Tappman shields his eyes, the Colonel starts the conversation.

- Colonel: Well Chaplain, we don't see much of you around here lately.
- Chaplain: Sir, I try to stay out of the way as much as possible. Well, well I have a feeling I make many of the men uncomfortable.
- Colonel: Nonsense. I can't imagine any of the men not enjoying the benefits of your presence. Unless, of course, they're atheists. Guess there's not much chance of that, is there?
- Chaplain: I don't know.
- Colonel: What do you mean you don't know. Atheism is against the law, isn't it?
- Chaplain: No.
- Colonel: Well, if it isn't, it's un-American.
- Chaplain: I'm not sure.
- Colonel: Well I am! If I found any lousy atheists on this base you can be sure that their ass is soon going to be believing in something. Well, that's not why I called you in, Chaplain. I want you to look at this. Page 48. *Saturday Evening Post*. You don't have to read the whole thing. I think you can get the point from the photographs. There's a full-page picture of a Colonel in England whose chaplain conducts prayers before every mission. I see no reason why the *Saturday Evening Post* should not be interested in the story of *my* outfit. I want you to think of some nice snappy prayers that will send the officers out feeling good. Can you do that?
- Chaplain: I'll try.

Colonel: Is there something else?
 Chaplain: Sir, it may be none of my business but I think some of the men are particularly upset about the fact you keep raising the number of missions that they have to fly.

Colonel: You're right, Chaplain!
 Chaplain: I am, sir?
 Colonel: You're right. Yes, it's none of your business. And it's none of their business either. Their business is to fly missions. Your business is to think of some short catchy prayers that'll get me into *Saturday Evening Post* Good Afternoon, Chaplain!⁷

In spite of the futility of his position and pleas, the chaplain watches as Yossarian finds an escape to his dilemma. The chaplain proclaims the discovery that Yossarian can make it to Sweden in a little rubber life raft as "a miracle." The chaplain, rejected by military protocol and regarded as a fool, finally becomes a celebrant to Yossarian's ascent to freedom.

The tenuous relationship between Commander and the commanded, *i.e.* the chaplain, is delightfully played out in the Academy-Award winning "Patton." As General Patton, George C. Scott arrogantly sets forth his spiritual superiority, even over the chaplain. He is called by God, even as a reincarnated Caesar or Napoleon to be victorious over his, (and God's) enemies. When he is lambasted by the press and rejected by Eisenhower for slapping a cowardly soldier, he cries out in prayer: "O God, Thou art my God But those that seek my soul . . . Shall fall by the sword. But the king shall rejoice in God." He is one with the Creator, the King of Kings.

In Sicily, Patton speeds through the mountains on his way to invade Palermo and comes across a chaplain and two clergymen.

Soldier: General, these men have come from the states to look at the spiritual welfare of the men.
 Chaplain: I was interested in seeing a Bible by your bed. Do you actually find time to read it?
 Patton: I sure do. Every goddamn day.

⁷ An early 1953 issue of *Look Magazine* did highlight and applaud the work and ministry of actual chaplains in Korea. I mention it with pride because one photograph showed my father, Chaplain John Lindvall, conducting a field service in the snow.

Patton respects his men when they do their jobs, even the chaplain. During the heart of the Battle of the Bulge, Patton's Third Army races to Bastogne to relieve the beleaguered troops. But snowy conditions hinder their progress. The forecast is for continued inclement weather. When told he may have to wait for better weather, Patton calls the Chaplain.

- Chaplain: You want to see me General.
Patton: Oh yeah, chaplain. I'm sick and tired of the Third Army having to fight the Germans, the Supreme Command, no gasoline, and now this ungodly weather. I want a prayer. A weather prayer.
Chaplain: A weather prayer, sir?
Patton: Yes, let's see if you can't get God working with us in this thing.
Chaplain: It's going to take a pretty thick rug for that kind of praying.
Patton: I don't care if it takes a flying carpet.
Chaplain: Well, I don't know how this is going to be received, General, but praying for good weather so we can kill our fellow man?
Patton: I can assure you sir because of my intimate relations with the Almighty, if you write a good prayer we will have good weather. I expect that prayer within the hour.

The prayer arrives into Patton's hands as he is walking along a dirt road in the midst of a blizzard. As he reads the prayer a montage of fierce combat scenes blast forth. Patton reads.

Almighty and most merciful Father. We humbly beseech Thee of Thy great goodness to restrain this immoderate weather with which we've had to contend. Grant us fair weather for battle. Graciously hearken to us as soldiers who call upon Thee. That armed with Thy power, we may advance from victory to victory and crush the oppression and wickedness of our enemies. And establish Thy justice among men and nations. Amen.

The next day the sun shines and the weather is perfect. Patton, speaking to his staff, says: "Cog, get me that chaplain. He stands in good with the Lord and I want to decorate him."

Dalton Trumbo, another of the blacklisted Hollywood Ten, directed a provocative film on the insane horrors of war entitled

“Johnny Got His Gun.” It offers a brief but noble image of the chaplain who sets spiritual values above practical ones.

Johnny (Timothy Bottoms) is brutally and totally maimed by a land mine in WWI. He loses his arms, legs, speech, sight; no communication occurs until a nurse realizes he is sending S.O.S. in Morse Code. He then drums out: “Kill me, Kill me. Kill me.” A self-righteous general will not allow the euthanasia and confronts the Roman Catholic chaplain in a scene taut with tension between the military and religious faith.

- General: Don't *you* have some message for him, Padre? You could at least tell him to put his faith in the Lord.
- Chaplain: I'll pray for him for the rest of my days. I will not risk putting his faith against your stupidity.
- General: (sarcastically) You're a helluva priest, aren't you?
- Chaplain: He's the product of your profession, not mine.

Trumbo sets the spiritual calling of the chaplain squarely against the aims and mission of the military. In a rare example, the chaplain stands as the conscience of the military, a prophet pointing his finger at the sin of his society.

Old Chaplains Never Die

1970 stands as the zenith for cinematic portrayals of chaplains. Since then, the chaplain has faded from the screen. Even when films have followed soldiers on religious quests in search of the heart of darkness (“Apocalypse Now,” 1979) or in attempts to rescue or save fallen and imprisoned friends (“The Deer Hunter,” 1978; “Uncommon Valor,” 1983, and (though I shudder to include it) “Rambo,” 1985) there are no chaplains. Recent films like “Heartbreak Ridge” and “Platoon” indicate a re-emerging fascination with our military heritage. Whether its motive is to subvert and revise the myth of the glorious wars or to celebrate American bravado, contemporary film does not recognize the role of the chaplaincy.

The curious and complex correlations of reality and cinematic fictions invite further investigation and analysis. This article has sought to merely describe selected films and note apparent trends in the portrayal of chaplains in film. New questions arise. Did real chaplains of each era inspire their filmic counterparts? Were the chaplains of early WW II nobler and more visible than later men and women of God? Were chaplains in 1970 the stumble bums and incompetents of *M*A*S*H** or *Catch-22*? I think not. But one must

inquire why the image of chaplains faded so dramatically from 1940 to 1980. Is it because of changes in society—or in the presence and activity of chaplains themselves?

It may be that chaplains are such leaven in the military that our presence can only be discerned in an eschatological sense. Or it may be as in the 1960 Oscar-winning cartoon by Gene Deitch and Jules Feiffer, *Munro*, that the chaplain is just part of the military establishment. Along with the army doctor, the psychiatrist, and lawyer, the chaplain is another professional who does his perfunctory duty.

The presence and contributions of the American chaplain have been overlooked recently in American films, due in part because chaplains don't obviously provide dramatic fodder for film scripts. (This is not an invitation for chaplains to commit perverse acts of sexual violence to get a Hollywood producer to approach them for rights to their story.) It is ironic to note that the best film portraying chaplains, in my opinion, is a foreign film that is *about* chaplains.

The international eye of Roberto Rossellini looked objectively and kindly at chaplains in his neo-realist classic "Paisan" (1946). One episode follows three American chaplains who visit a Franciscan monastery in Italy during the latter stages of WW II.

Panic occurs when the Catholic monks discover that one of the chaplains is a teetotaling Protestant, who jokes about being Martin Luther, and the other is a Jewish chaplain. Concern for their lost souls preoccupies the monastic brothers who choose to fast for the salvation of these two errant men. The Roman Catholic chaplain is upbraided for not showing the Protestant and Jewish chaplains the truth.

Monk: Forgive me if I ask a question. You've been long with the other two clergymen.

R.C. Chaplain: We were together through the entire Italian campaign. 20 months, 21 months. They're good dear friends For them I've the deepest respect and admiration.

Monk: Didn't you reveal to them the true religion? You never tried?

R.C. Chaplain: But Father, the Protestant and the Jew are just as convinced that theirs is the path of truth.

Monk: But we know *they* are in error.

Second Monk: Yes, we *know*.

Monk: We must try by every means . . . to save these two souls Have you scrutinized their consciences?

Second Monk: Are they in good faith?
Third Monk: Have you discussed it with them?
R.C. Chaplain: No, I've never scrutinized their conscience . . . I never discussed it. I never questioned them because I never felt I could judge them . . . I know them too well. They are dear friends. Perhaps, surrounded as you are by peace . . . in an atmosphere of undisturbed meditation you may consider me remiss. However, I don't feel guilty . . . or remiss in my conscience.

“Paisan” is a celebration of chaplains, whose personal commitments to God’s truth need not result in religious intolerance. Rossellini exquisitely captured the ecumenical breadth and the playful camaraderie of American chaplains. The loving sketches of these three chaplains are wonderful, but rare. “Paisan” exists, as might a gallery portrait by Renoir, while other modern images have totally forgotten the faces and faith of chaplains.

Even as it seems the film industry has deposited the chaplain in studio vaults and on late-night movies, one always hopes that as Hollywood examines the crises, sufferings, and joys of military life, the chaplain may quietly, but forcefully, reappear to minister to his troops.