

# six of the best

## Fictional priests chosen by Stephen Hough, pianist



### SILENCE (2016)

This film directed by Martin Scorsese, based on the novel by Shusaku Endo, is set in 17th-century Japan, where Christianity had been embraced, but is now dying out because of fierce persecution. The few surviving priests have apostatised or are being tortured to death. When God seems silent, even in the face of such suffering, what response can he expect from the desperate believer?



### PRIEST (1994)

Written by Jimmy McGovern and the debut for the director Antonia Bird, *Priest* explores faithfulness and personal weakness in the life of its principal character (Linas Roache), a good man who is unable to live up to the sexual expectations of his church yet finds himself at the shattering climax of the story as (unwittingly) a source of grace for a young girl being abused by her father.



There is a strange glamour about the Catholic priesthood that continues to fascinate even those who have nothing but contempt for what they see as its role as spokesman and symbol for outdated, outlandish dogmas. This glamour persists in the world of the arts too and over the past couple of years one of the finest films (*Silence*) and one of the finest television series (*Broken*) have portrayed clerics as authentic heroes despite lives shaped by archaic religious observance. In my novel *The Final Retreat*, even that observance has tarnished and the "wounded healer" at the centre of the story seems beyond repair, but at its best, a priest's ability to enter the intimate lives of strangers is not so much a wielding of privilege as a willingness to share in suffering — literally com-passion. Stephen Hough's debut novel, *The Final Retreat*, is published by Sylph Editions. He plays Debussy, Beethoven and Schumann at the Royal Festival Hall, London SE1, on April 5



### BROKEN (2017)

Sean Bean plays an ordinary priest from an ordinary northern English parish trying to grapple with ordinary people's problems in this BBC TV drama series. Jimmy McGovern's astonishing script takes us to the heart of the priest as "father", giving up marriage and children to become the protector of a larger family, especially the most vulnerable members of the community.

### FATHER BROWN (1901-1936)

GK Chesterton's priest-as-sleuth is a lovable, larger-than-life character reminiscent in some ways of his author. In these 53 short stories — which have been endlessly adapted for film and TV, most famously in the 1954 film starring Alec Guinness as Father Brown — crime can be solved with a light touch and the evil behind it is something that requires healing and mercy as much as justice.

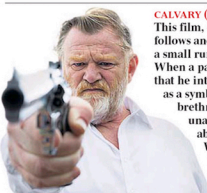


### 1. CONFESSION (1953)

The classic story of the dilemma of the seal of Confession turned into a thrilling film by Alfred Hitchcock. A man confesses to killing someone and the priest (Montgomery Clift) comes under suspicion for the murder, but cannot defend himself, bound as he is by his vow of secrecy. The final scene of reconciliation is a poignant symbol of the real meaning of confession: forgiveness not so much a matter of justice as an act of self-giving that goes to the very heart of being authentically human.

### CAVALRY (2014)

This film, directed by John Michael McDonagh, follows another ordinary priest (Brendan Gleeson) in a small rural village where everyone knows everyone. When a parishioner turns up in Confession to say that he intends to kill the priest in the next week, as a symbolic punishment for all those of his brethren who have abused children, he is unable to expose that person, but has to go about his daily business as if he didn't know. We, the viewers, are not told who the murderer is and we live that week through the anxious, but somehow serene eyes of the intended victim.



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