

# Television viewing sparks religious experience

By JIM RYAN  
Ascension of the Lord  
Mark 16:15-20  
May 12, 1991

**PATHS OF GLORY**  
I had a religious experience a little over a week ago while watching T.V.

I'm serious.  
No, it wasn't while watching Oral Roberts or Pat Robertson. It certainly wasn't Robert Schuller or Kenneth Copeland.

It was Stanley Kubrick, or rather, a film directed by him in 1957, Paths of Glory.

**A RELIGIOUS FILM?**  
Paths of Glory isn't about God, although He/She is mentioned from time to time; nor is it about priests, although there is a priest in the film; nor is it about nuns, or missionaries, or born-again rock musicians.

It's about French soldiers during W.W. I, men who live under the extraordinary stresses of military discipline during war-time.

Our soldiers, members of the 701 Regiment, are under the care of Colonel Dax, played by Kirk Douglas. (He's the good guy.) They're also in the incompetent hands of General Macready. (He's the bad guy.)

Anyway, General Macready sends the 701 out on an impossible mission to attack the German lines. The men are "cut to ribbons" and retreat back to their lines. The General is furious and has three men chosen from the 701 to be court-martialed and ex-

ecuted by firing squad.

Kirk Douglas defends the three men and learns a lesson about military life - it's corrupt and political. The General wants to save face by putting the blame on his "cowardly" troops.

Douglas learns that during the battle, the General had ordered his artillery to fire on his own trenches to punish his retreating troops. He presents this information to the Chief of Staff hoping that the lives of his three men will be saved.

It doesn't work. They are shot. But that same day, the Chief of Staff fires Macready, and offers the job to Douglas, thinking that Douglas' motivation all along was to advance his career.

Douglas storms out, refusing the offer.  
These are the lessons we all learn in life, right?

Now comes the religious part. It's the last scene in the film.

It occurs in a bar on the base. The bar is full of soldiers of the 701, who are drinking and singing during their brief furlough.

The bartender tells them he has a special treat for them. He brings out a young German woman, captured by the French army. She is an attractive woman who is not a "professional", just someone caught up by the war. She is wearing a long skirt and a blouse that covers her arms and comes up to her neck. She isn't wearing any makeup.

The soldiers in the bar shout the equivalent of, "Take it off",



Religion and Reality  
by Jim Ryan

and I have visions of the film, The Accused, which I'd seen two nights before.

The bartender says, "She can do nothing but sing."

The soldiers shout even louder. She begins.

And then the miracle happens. As she sings the men quiet down. Some hum along with her. The others sit silently or cry.

They sit in a bar, members of military system that uses bands of iron to tie them together, but here they are tied together by the song of a young woman. Her vulnerability and gentleness touches them and connects them with their families and with their lives away from the war. She reminds them of their mothers, wives, daughters or sisters.

This is a religious experience for them. In this bar they are a community bound together by love and mutual respect.

It's an anti-war film, right.  
But it's also a film about any group or organization that loses

sight of the value and integrity of it's members. It's a film about the possibility of creating human communities that run on life-giving values.

**THE ASCENSION**

The Ascension is the story of the archetypal path of and to glory. Mark writes it funny though. Christ appears like a coach giving a last minute pep-talk to the boys of the Good News team, called the Eleven, before going up into the stands to watch the game with his father, otherwise known as God. His father, who owns both the team and the stadium, has a box in the stands. Christ will communicate with his boys on the field by cellular phone.

The impressioen given is that

the game is fixed. Whatever Christ says into the phone will be done, and in the end, the other team will lose. The other team, called the Unbelievers, are associated with devils, snakes and plagues, and even though they have such a powerful arsenal of evil agents on their side, they won't overcome the superior game plan of the Believers.

Mark was writing a sportscast for a people who thought they were losing the game. In fact, many of Mark's readers would later be thrown into stadiums not unlike our Dome to do battle with a team called the Rome Lions. Mark wanted to encourage his readers not to give up on their team.

## United Church to investigate internal harassment and abuse

The United Church of Canada's General Council Executive has approved a recommendation that the Moderator, the Right Reverend Dr. Walter Farquharson, form a Task Group on harassment and abuse. That Task Group would report to the General Council Sub-Executive in the fall of 1991.

The work of the Task Group would be to gather information about existing United Church policies on sexual harassment, evaluate these policies and action guidelines and make recommendations to the Sub-Executive.

The Task Group has also been asked to define other forms of harassment and abuse to which the United Church needs to address itself.

"Recently there have been an increasing number of rumors and

letters of concern about members and ministers of the United Church who feel they are being harassed because they represent an opinion on church policy that differs from someone else's point of view," says Dr. Farquharson.

He adds, "As Moderator, I've also had a number of conversations with a variety of individuals on the same subject."

What's interesting," Farquharson says, "is that if this anecdotal information is any indication, it isn't one group or another that has a monopoly on feeling like they are the ones being harassed."

The Task Group has been asked to prepare a theological statement on matters such as legitimate dissent and dealing with conflict that's appropriate to the tradition of The United Church of Canada. It will also

develop or improve guidelines for grievance procedures and conflict resolution.

At the same time the Task Group will examine claims by women and men who experience harassment on the basis of their sexuality, marital status or sexual orientation.

"What the Executive has said by taking this action is that it's time for the United Church to define very clearly for its members what is and isn't acceptable in terms of legitimate dissent and reasonable discipline," explains General Secretary, the Reverend Dr. Howard Mills.

The Task Group, which has not yet been named, will be made up of not less than six volunteers based in southern Ontario.

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