

What would Christopher Foyle do?

By [David Heim](#)

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I've seen a bumper sticker that says, "What would Atticus do?"—a tribute to Atticus Finch, the saintly lawyer in *To Kill a Mockingbird*.

Having finished watching (via Netflix) six seasons of the BBC TV series [Foyle's War](#), I'm ready to slap on a "What would Christopher Foyle do?" sticker.

In *Foyle's War*, [the marvelous Michael Kitchen](#) plays a taciturn, principled police commissioner on the south coast of England during World War II. Foyle knows that hauling in local crooks is small potatoes in the midst of a world war, but he never cuts corners. When asked to alter the pursuit of justice to suit a political or military goal, he politely refuses, invariably asking, "Isn't that the kind of thing we are fighting this war to defeat?"

Foyle is kind, but without a trace of sentimentality. With colleagues he exhibits a Benedictine spirituality: he gives the strong something to strive for, but the weak have nothing to fear.

Foyle's criminal investigations intersect with fascinating details of wartime history (profiteering, the black market, women working in the munitions industry).

A sign of the clever research behind the show is an episode called "Plan of Attack." A subplot involves some leaders of the Church of England who, late in the war, opposed the Allies' demand for Germany's unconditional surrender. Francis Wood, a fictional bishop, is loosely modeled on [George Bell](#), bishop of Chichester, who criticized saturation bombing and wanted the Allies to reach out to Germans like Dietrich Bonhoeffer who opposed Hitler.

Bonhoeffer's name even comes up in conversation. (Foyle is skeptical of the bishop's ideas, but he must be reading theology in his spare time, because he recognizes the name Bonhoeffer.)

Popular demand in England prompted a seventh season of shows, which treat Foyle in the aftermath of the war. They are slated to air on PBS in September.