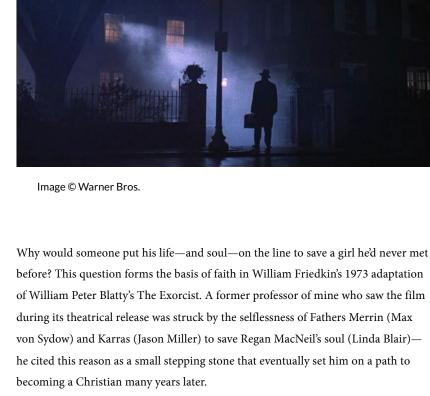
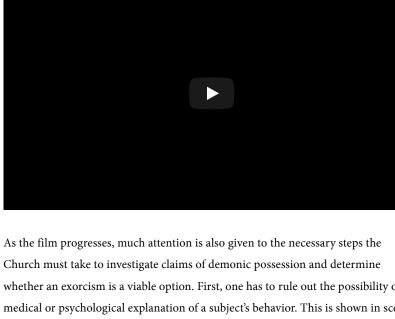
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## Dec 5 Finding the Sacred Among the Profane / The Exorcist / Sean Woodard Film (/2017-posts/category/Film)



The film, which won Oscars for Sound and Best Adapted Screenplay, is often cited as the scariest movie of all time by multiple publications. However, it may be more correct to view the film as perhaps the most accurate depiction of the Catholic Church's Rite of Exorcism in a popular medium. Even with its sensationalist special effects, The Exorcist grounds faith, modern medicine, and psychiatry in reality while developing sympathetic characters. By presenting the subject matter and narrative in a documentary style, Friedkin allows the viewer to digest the material concurrently

with the characters in the film. While much speculation has surrounded a purported "curse"—The Exorcist is one of many films, including Poltergeist, whose productions have been allegedly hindered by supernatural occurrences—more interesting is how Roman Catholic priests served as technical advisors to the film and the amount of research author William Peter Blatty conducted into a 1949 exorcism case to inform the basis of his novel and screenplay. This authenticity gives more weight to the building narrative and especially the sequences where Father Merrin and Karras confront the spirit inside Regan.



whether an exorcism is a viable option. First, one has to rule out the possibility of a medical or psychological explanation of a subject's behavior. This is shown in scenes



stylized ritual in which rabbis or priests try to drive out the so-called invading spirit. It's pretty much discarded these days, except by the Catholics who keep it in the closet as a sort of embarrassment. It has worked, in fact, although not for the reason they think, of course. It was purely the force of suggestion. The victim's belief in possession helped cause it. And just in the same way, this belief in the power of

Although Barringer dismisses the notion of demonic possession as an extension of delusion, it is enough for Regan's mother to reach out to Father Karras for help. Karras is skeptical at first and even admits to her that psychiatric care may be the best route to help Regan. Regarding exorcism, he adds: "There are no experts. You probably know as much about possession than most priests." By giving Father Karras a background in psychiatry allows him to act as an intermediary between the realms of modern medicine and faith. He examines Regan's inconclusive medical results with a rational eye, but her behavior becomes more erratic and her symptoms don't align perfectly with proposed psychological

diagnoses. After the Church reaches a verdict based on the evidence presented, it sanctions Father Merrin to perform an exorcism with Father Karras as his assistant. Karras' involvement in Regan's case challenges his beliefs and ultimately resolves his

In the extended cut of the film, Karras asks: "Why? Why this girl?" Merrin replies, "I think the point is to make us despair. To see ourselves as . . . animal and ugly. To

make us reject the possibility that God could love us."

exorcism can make it disappear."

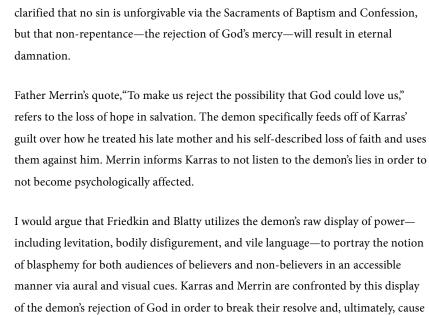
crisis of faith.

This quote alludes to the Catholic Church's position on mortal sin and the interpretation of blasphemy against the Holy Spirit. The biblical passage often cited to support Jesus' teaching on unforgivable sin is that of Matthew 12:31-32:

"Therefore, I say to you, every sin and blasphemy will be forgiven people, but blasphemy against the Spirit will not be forgiven. And whoever speaks a word against the Son of Man will be forgiven; but whoever speaks against the holy Spirit

Over the centuries, Church Fathers have debated the meaning of this passage. Thomas Aquinas even addresses six sins that purportedly qualify as blasphemy against the Holy Spirit, including despair. Some have additionally tied the sin of despair to a rejection of repentance. The Catechism of the Catholic Church has since

will not be forgiven, either in this age or in the age to come."



them to despair as Merrin hypothesizes. Despite the demon's attempts, they persist, even though the battle over Regan's soul costs them their lives. However, Father Karras has undergone a transformation and completes his character arc by accepting

To conclude, I would like to address an interesting phenomena of late. According to a recent feature published in the Atlantic, the Catholic Church has received more than a thousand exorcism requests this year and that since 2011 the number of priests who have been trained to perform the Rite of Exorcism has increased to

A few years ago, the Catholic Church granted Friedkin permission to film an actual

documentary The Devil and Father Amorth. Father Gabriele Amorth was a Catholic priest who was authorized to administer exorcism in the name of the Church. In the documentary, he is seen performing the ninth exorcism upon an Italian woman in 2016. Friedkin frames the documentary by recalling the success of The Exorcist and the case history that inspired it before presenting the footage and weaving multiple interviews with authors, medical professionals, and Father Robert Barron, who

exorcism and release the authorized footage, which is collected in the 2017

God's mercy; Father Dyer then absolves Karras of his sins prior to death.

approximately 100.

occurrence.

serves as an auxiliary bishop of Los Angeles and is known for his media ministry series Word on Fire. While skeptics have questioned the authenticity of the footage and Friedkin's credibility as a documentarian (partly due to one alleged event that Friedkin describes yet admits he failed to record), it is important to note the display of faith shown by the woman's family as Father Amorth performs the exorcism. Furthermore, Friedkin shares the footage with psychiatrists and neurologists and asks for their professional opinions. It is interesting to note that since the Exorcist was released, it appears as if the dialogue between faith and science regarding the subject has not necessarily advanced. Many of the responses given by doctors in the documentary reflect the arguments that were presented in the feature film. In total,

the documentary may not sway viewers in either direction in the debate regarding whether demonic possession is an aspect of mental health or an actual spiritual

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