

# WELLINGTON STUDENT MINISTRY

## MOVIE REVIEW: Exorcism of Emily Rose

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October 10, 2005

This film is centered around the true story of the trial of a Catholic priest who performed an exorcism on a female college student who soon afterwards died. The priest was being charged for negligent homicide that led to Emily Rose's death. Emily's problems were diagnosed by doctors as being a psychological condition and she was being treated with medication. When Emily and her family felt the problems were spiritual in nature they brought in Father Richard Moore to help her. He performed a failed exorcism and took Emily off her medication. Soon afterwards she died from a combination of self-inflicted wounds and complications from malnutrition.

This is no typical horror movie featuring a parade of scream queens attending summer camp and being chased by predictable monsters who don't die. *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* was created to be "both horrific and meaningful" according to the co-writer and director **Scott Derrickson**, who also wrote and directed *Hell Raiser: Inferno* and writes screenplays for the popular producer Jerry Bruckheimer (*National Treasure*, *Pearl Harbor*, *Black Hawk Down*, *CSI*, *CSI: Miami*, and *Without a Trace*). Although it is a dialogue movie with no spectacular special effects, this movie will scare you. "The goal", according to Derrickson in an interview with Hollywood Jesus Website, "is to frighten and entertain the audience, but then leave them thinking about spiritual and religious questions that they may not otherwise think about." The two primary questions that are raised by this film are; does a spiritual realm exist that consists of God and Satan, who can influence our lives?; is science the definitive authority on what is real or is it limited in spiritual matters? Both of these questions are important to our society and very useful for Christians to use as a platform to engage others with the gospel.

Although many views are presented -Catholic, Christian, Agnostic, and a humanistic view of science- it is important to understand that the context of this movie is Catholic in its theology and traditions, not Christian or biblical. This context is the key to explaining what you are seeing and why it is happening. It is the context that guides the audience to be disillusioned and confused rather than asking inspiring questions about God. This situation is a Catholic experience, not a Christian experience. A true Christian experience would have been an entirely different encounter and resolution. The difference between the experiences rests upon the two different theologies.

The Catholic theological position does not embrace Scripture alone as the final authority, or faith in Jesus Christ alone as the author, sustainer, and perfecter of the spiritual life of His people. Therefore, moviegoers are given an inaccurate perspective of God, Satan, faith and life. This view prevents people from drawing an accurate biblical conclusion and they leave the theater, doubting God's sovereignty over Satan, fearful of their vulnerability to demonic forces, and a general sense of confusion. Those not grounded in the Bible have no reason to doubt what they have just seen in this movie, especially since it begins by stating "based on a true story."

The absence of Jesus is the other major problem with this movie. This movie is an example of the current Christian culture that removes Christ from the center of *Christianity*. The only time Jesus' name was mentioned was at the end of the ritual prayers recited during the exorcism, "in the name of Jesus, Amen." Emily, the Rose family, and the priest are all considered "devout" Catholics. However, this devoutness to Catholicism cannot be confused with actual saving faith in Jesus Christ which determines if someone is a Child of God. Biblically, the absence of Jesus is very telling about the story, that those involved were not believing in Him as a Savior or a Lord. Instead, "Jesus" is just something you say during a ritual, but not actually someone to trust in dire times. Derrickson's absence of Jesus only convinced the audience that Satan exists and God, if he exists, is powerless and distant.

The movie leads people to assume that Emily was an actual believer who would be considered a Child of God. Because of this assumption, the audience is led to think that, if demons can possess even the people of God, then no one is safe and God can't protect you. For those unfamiliar with the Word of God, the end result of this movie is fear and doubt in God, not hope or reassurance that God has overcome evil through Jesus, and those who place their trust in Him have no reason to fear. Unfortunately many will think, "If all I saw was true, faith in God is meaningless."

The movie never provided any biblical indication that Emily actually had a genuine faith in Jesus. Biblically, this would be evident in a hungering for Christ through worship, prayer, the Word of God, fellowship with the body of Christ, and evidenced gifts of the Spirit. The same is true for Father Moore, who when tormented by the demon, does not turn to Christ to be saved but shockingly prays to the Archangel Michael. He even suggests for people to pray the rosary, which reveals the belief in ritual over trust in Christ. The high point of the movie takes a hard mystical turn when Emily claims to be visited by Mary and she becomes a stigmata. Although this scene helps to add a positive tone to a tragically dark situation, it moves in sharp contradiction with Scripture.

The Bible affirms that those who are actual Christians by faith in Jesus have the Holy Spirit residing in them. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, believers are no longer slaves to sin because “the One who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world [1 John 4:4, Rom. 6:6-10, Rom. 8:37-38].” Believers are given power over demonic forces and promised that if they resist them and submit to God the demonic forces will flee [Jam. 4:7]. Christians can permit demons to affect them as they engage in willful sinful acts. However, a demon cannot ever render the Holy Spirit, who resides in every true believer, powerless.

### **Useful to Kingdom Building?**

Though the movie falls down in raising questions that lead to a greater awareness and trust in God through Jesus, it has great potential for building the Kingdom of God because of its ability to stir emotions and spiritually thinking. This stirring is a great opportunity for discussion about many topics:

- Whose authority do we trust: science, tradition, ritual, or the Bible and Jesus?
- Why do we trust those authorities with our lives?
- What do you think about demons and their relationship with God?
- How do you explain what happened to Emily?
- What does it really mean to know God?
- How can you protect yourself from demons?

Ask around, find friends who saw it and begin asking them what they thought, were they scared, what was their favorite scene, what do they believe, what would you do if you were Emily? There are many openings for the gospel in this movie.

### **Challenge to Christians**

Two challenges for Christians arise from this movie. First, as followers of our Lord Jesus, we must ask ourselves, “Do we trust the scriptures over the self-proclaimed authority of science?” Or do you secretly wait for science to prove Christianity true so you can say, see I told you? In reality, science is not the authority that determines what is and what is not. Modern humanistic science operates more as a religion with its first premise being – there is no God. However, God is obviously displayed throughout all of His creation, as the Scriptures testify. It is sin that blinds people to the obvious and distorts the beautiful reality of God into total foolishness. As a result, they declare their insanity as authoritative wisdom and withhold thanks and worship from God who deserves it.

The second challenge to Christians is in living with Jesus as your Lord, not merely claiming it. Is Jesus your Lord in that he is the centerpiece of your life or is he conveniently used for your own purposes of meeting your needs as you define them? To see how close to center Jesus is in your life, ask yourself:

- Do you trust Scripture over the ideas and theories of people and science?
- Why did I go see this movie, for my own entertainment or as a tool to build the Kingdom of God?
- Am I grounded in Scripture so as to discern the problems with this movie, or was I left confused?
- How fearful am I about life, demons, safety, and the future?
- What do I turn to for comfort during struggles and solutions to problems?

Jesus alone is the answer to all of life, the definition of success, and the solution to all problems. Fear, anger, and anxiousness are evidences that Jesus is not being served as Lord, but rather idols. The idols of your heart have a promised result in that they will make you hunger for more because they are unable to satisfy. As idols fail to live up to your false expectations, you become angry, frustrated, worried, and fearful. Disappointed, you seek relief by feeding your idols more, starting the cycle all over. Praise be to God that by the power, love and forgiveness of Jesus you can break free from the cycle of idoltry and experience real peace. The Scripture tells us, “Repent therefore, and turn again, that your sins may be blotted out, that times of refreshing may come from the presence of the Lord [Acts 3:19-20, 1 John 1:9]. Abandon your fears, have faith in Jesus and live free!