



Written by [Eric Egan](#) on August 30, 2010

The Last Exorcism: Be Gone, Banality!

The Last Exorcism could have been a very thoughtful exploration of skepticism being thrown into doubt (if not out the window) in the face of spiritual evidence to the contrary; unfortunately, however, the film throws all that out with its ridiculous ending.

The movie begins very promisingly with an alleluia-screaming, amen-culling Southern preacher who lost his faith long ago. Would this preacher's secret skepticism be challenged? Would he regain his faith, as occurred, for example, with the ex-minister who had lost his faith in *Signs*? In *The Last Exorcism*, the fraudulent preacher is a representation of faith in science. When his child becomes ill and is cured by medical science, the first thought that comes to his mind is, "Thank you, doctor." He is shocked that his first thought is not, "Thank you, God," and this causes a crisis of faith from which he emerges faithless.



He is able to justify his fraudulent behavior, however, as a service rendered. There can be nothing wrong with making a "possessed" person "feel" better, his reasoning goes — never mind that he does not even believe in demons. So he continues his ministry, more a traveling magician of cheap tricks, culling Benjamins right along with those amens. For him, religion is indeed the opiate of the masses, but as long as they want the drug — why not give it to them?

For years, however, his bread and butter has come largely from plying the exorcism trade. However, when word spreads that a child has been killed by another preacher during a fraudulent exorcism, he decides that he must expose the practice for the fraud it is. So he hires a camera crew to document his last, fraudulent exorcism.

This is where the film starts, all the aforementioned being back story revealed in documentary-style interviews. The whole film is shot as a documentary, which turns out to be both its greatest strength and greatest weakness. This style lends a feeling of reality and immediacy to the story that allows for some chilling and clever twists to the horror genre. In one of the most frightening sequences, the camera turns on, and the first sight the viewer is subjected to is a shot of the possessed's shoes. It is revealed very quickly that the camera person is "the possessed" and it is truly chilling to feel that, as a viewer, you are in the hands of the devil. Every nerve is tense, ready to turn from what the demon might wish to reveal.

There are other clever uses of the documentary style; in the end, however, the film's conclusion renders impossible the idea that the audience could view this "documentary" as believable. Moreover, the completely preposterous ending is mostly incongruent with the first 95 percent of the movie, so that an



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otherwise thought-provoking film is rendered a total waste of both the audience's time and the filmmakers' talents.

The Last Exorcism promises to be an exploration of skepticism in the light of evidence of the spiritual as well as faith gone wrong. While the preacher represents skepticism, the father of the "possessed" represents the polar opposite of faith in science. When the documentary film crew and the preacher show up to perform the exorcism, the father reveals to his guests that his wife has been dead for two years. When she was diagnosed with breast cancer, various doctors were unable to cure her. Because of medicine's failure to save his wife, the father completely lost his faith in science — and his faith in God devolved into scrupulous superstition.

He contacts the preacher because his livestock are being slaughtered every night in a fiendish manner, and all the evidence points to his daughter. The preacher is delighted to find that the father is the perfect candidate to have a "possessed" daughter. His superstitious mish-mash of a "creed" is precisely what marks a man who would either consciously or subconsciously manipulate his daughter to act possessed. The preacher believes this girl to be a perfect candidate to expose the hoax of "possession." Unfortunately for the preacher, he discovers that the quotation marks around possession are not always justified.

The Last Exorcism is rated PG-13, but this movie is definitely closer to R. Though the violence is mostly against animals, it is extreme, to say the least. And then there are the intense sequences, and some minor sexuality, not to mention the fact that this is a film about exorcism. Personally, any exorcism film scares the Hell out of me — no pun intended. And had I not been assigned to review it based on our guess that it would be the top-grossing film at the box office this weekend (as of this writing, it barely holds that position, with *Takers* a close second, based on preliminary estimates), I would have stayed home.

Much of whether a viewer will like *The Last Exorcism* will rest on that individual's views of faith, science, and demon-possession.

Personally, I loved most of this film, and for the first hour and a half or so was very engaged. Indeed, half the tension I experienced stemmed from whether or not the movie would come down solidly on the side of faith. Unfortunately, the ending made me feel a little like I was being laughed at as one who believes in this "stuff," and for not immediately recognizing that the whole thing was meant to be a satire rather than a serious exploration of faith. The film, out of nowhere, turns out to be more *Hot Fuzz* than *The Exorcism of Emily Rose*. And for a movie marketed as serious — and for the most part presenting itself as such — that is not a compliment.



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