

The Rite (2011)

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Published via MorbidlyBeautiful.com as part of [Thematic Thread: Religion in Horror](#) on April 12, 2020

The Rite is unique among supernatural horror stories.

Sure, there are plenty of exorcism movies out there. And, yes, many of them are based- or loosely based -on real life experiences. *The Exorcist* finds its roots with Roland Doe. *The Exorcism of Emily Rose* was inspired by Anneliese Michel. *The Rite* itself was born from Matt Baglio's 2009 non-fiction deep-dive into the education and training of Roman Catholic exorcists.

The Rite: The Making of a Modern Exorcist brought Baglio to the Pontifical Athenaeum Regina Apostolorum in Rome. Catholic priests and practitioners from around the world travel here to study subjects like theology, philosophy, ethics, religious sciences, and- for select clergymen -to learn the Rite of Exorcism. Here, Baglio met Father Gary Thomas, whose studies in Christian demonology and training in exorcism inspired producers to buy film rights before the book even hit shelves.

And here is where *The Rite* diverges from other supernatural stories. Where most tales begin with the possessed- with cursed objects and afflicted youths -*The Rite* begins in the Church. It follows a young priest (Colin O'Donoghue) on a journey of self-discovery as he travels to the Vatican and studies exorcism under the watchful eye of his mentor (Anthony Hopkins). Filmmakers brought Father Gary Thomas on as a consultant, and director Mikael Håfström even attended actual exorcisms to ensure accurate portrayals in the film.

This is an exorcism story that brings religion to the forefront. Where priests in other films might find themselves sidelined as secondary characters, or may otherwise be thrown in without much regard for or exploration of their faith, *The Rite* makes the Church a central figure. In a sense, faith becomes a character in and of itself. It lives and breathes in the imagery, the dialogue, the subject matter. The story is born from truth; true practices, true training, true faith. There are classic horror motifs, including possession hallmarks such as Latin speech, demonic voices in human hosts, and a victim restrained in a dark room. There are jump scares, and the film establishes its spooky tone right off the bat with an opening in a mortician's workspace. It's a scary movie; but it's also a coming-of-age movie, a story of a young man finding himself through his faith and the unique experiences he has within it.