



The scene outside movie theater more than an hour before box office opened.



Editor Viglucci gets an opinion on *The Exorcist* from Brother Ammon, member of the Processeans, a sect which finds admirable qualities in Satan as well as in Christ.

EXORCIST

Guys Wear Black

George Clouzot's *Diabolique* was eerier and more foreboding, Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* more shocking, and *M.A.S.H.* did a better job of portraying sickening gore.

This is not to take away from the work of Director William Friedkin whose special effects, photography, and lighting were on the whole artistically excellent. Particularly brilliant was the makeup.

And the acting performances were outstanding — my favorite being Jason Miller as Father Damien Karras.

But the characters were thin and I have a feeling that the role of the detective investigating the murder was emasculated. Lee J. Cobb immediately instills the feeling that this is going to be one sympathetic and strong character. Then for all intent and purposes, he slowly fades away, perhaps the victim of an editor's scissors. The role was stronger in the book.

There are subtle flaws — for instance, priests are made the objects of almost awe-ful reverence. Then there is the scene where Father Karras kisses the bishop's ring — that is even more of an anachronism than exorcism itself.

And unfortunately an overused gimmick was the use of a multitude of four-letter words to keep the action popping. The mother's salty language may be artistically appropriate for an agnostic actress. But wouldn't you think Satan himself would display a more diverse vocabulary than Mick Jagger. Particularly when confronting Jesuits.

There will be even more consternation over the presentation of the Church itself in the film. Clever photography often switches rapidly from the sacred to the profane — for instance, the camera jumps from the possessed girl vomiting all over a priest to a scene of the consecration of a Mass. One must wonder why.

Theological disputation is certain to arise over the theme of demonic possession. Many no longer believe it is possible but in traditional Church theology there is firm belief in the existence of the devil and that this power is capable of some sort of human possession. Thus the book and film are legitimate in exploring such subject matter.

The *Exorcist* already is controversial in other ways. A spate of requests for the rite has already begun and Church officials are sure to receive many more.

A Toronto minister feels that the film has a "significant religious message."

Brother Ammon, a member of the Processeans, a sect that admires Satan as well as Christ, agreed. He feels "it is good for people to see the confrontation between good and evil" although he thought the possession was "over dramatized."

The Catholic Film Newsletter, however, declares that the film "amounts to little more than an expensive horror movie in the escapist entertainment vein."

Disputes aside from artistic and theological judgment are in the wind. Actress Shirley MacLaine reportedly feels that the character of the little girl's mother (Mrs. MacNeil) was drawn from her life. She

reportedly also recognizes the principal movie setting as the interior of her own home. I have no knowledge of such but it is impossible to deny that Ellen Burstyn who is the film's mother bears a strong resemblance to Miss MacLaine.

Recounting the whole story is superfluous — anyone interested has already read the book. Briefly it concerns Regan MacNeil, as typical of American girlhood as say Anytown, U.S.A., is representative of American communities. The devil possesses her, presumably to attract Father Merrin into a new shootout; the old Jesuit had beat him one on one in an earlier encounter.

The ultimate battle is finally drawn when frail Father Merrin and Father Karras, having his own faith troubles, take on Satan. The two priests recite the rites of exorcism over an alternately swearing, spitting, serpent-tongued, levitating, conniving and powerful demon in a rousing but long climax.

The demise of one of the priests will raise more theological discussion with the unlikely but scarred question "did he jump or was he pushed?" If he did indeed jump what are his chances for redemption, even though his action was for the purpose of destroying his now-possessed body.

For a film most remarkable in its special effects there were still some absurdities — hearing a strange noise in the attic Mrs. MacNeil goes up alone (naturally) to investigate, carrying a candle (instead of a flashlight, of course). This takes place after a perhaps deliberately dull opening half-hour to set up the viewer. As she heads up the stairs, someone in the audience sized up the situation, "Here we go," he shouted.

But the attic intruder turns out to be only old Karl, a mysterious but innocent handyman with a foreign accent, which means that the whole scene was inappropriate to the overall action.

Exorcism itself isn't mentioned until an hour into the 121-minute movie. One of a group of consulting doctors suggests it as a possible solution to Regan's problems as strictly a psychiatric ploy. He tells the agnostic mother that the Church "keeps it in the closet as a sort of embarrassment."

You mean, asks the puzzled mother, "that I should take her to a witch doctor?" She eventually does, that is to a priest, and the story is in motion.

For Rochesterians, the anti-climactic ending held a pleasant surprise. For there in the role usually reserved for arch-heroes, walking off into the sunset, was our own Father William O'Malley of McQuaid High School.

The film is rated A-4 (morally objectionable for adults, with reservations) by the National Catholic Film Office and the movie industry classifies it "restricted" — no one under 18 allowed.

The ratings are fair.

Children and immature adults should not be subjected to this movie, not so much because of the controversy of the subject matter but because it is packaged in a slick though thin wrapping.