



Christopher Reeve, as a young American priest, kneels in reverence before his spiritual mentor, Cardinal Santoni, played by Fernando Rey, in "Monsignor," which opened Friday at Detroit-area theaters.

## the movies

### Louise Snider

# Priest on the rise falls from grace in R-rated loser

Louise Snider is on vacation. The following review is by guest critic Tom Panzenhagen.

Once upon a time, palookas from the lower east side grew up to become either hoodlums or priests. In Frank Yablans' new film, "Monsignor," Christopher Reeve does both.

In the old days, good and evil were as distinct as Pat O'Brien and Jimmy Cagney, and even an "oomph gal" like Ann Sheridan knew the difference in "Angels with Dirty Faces." In "Monsignor," good and evil coalesce beneath the well-chiseled features of an every-mother's son named John Flaherty, who evolves from glib young priest to corporate giant of the Vatican in two not-so-short hours.

During his transformation from seminarian to Machiavellian, Father Flaherty also manages to kill for his country and love for himself. The former transgression, which finds the fresh-faced field chaplain manning a machine gun and mowing down Germans during World War II, accounts for the film's only forceful moments.

Reeve, after performing the last rites over a dying soldier in a foxhole strewn with other dead soldiers, lays down the cross and picks up the sword, as it were. The sequence provides compelling background for Flaherty's first fall from grace.

The rest of the film, however, must be accepted on blind faith alone.

FOLLOWING THE battlefield heroics, Flaherty is reassigned to the Vatican, where he meets a Boston bishop who smokes a big cigar and talks more like a big-city boss than a man of the cloth. This Tammany Hall cleric informs Flaherty that it's his job to "look out for American interests" at the Vatican, which the politico-priest calls an Italian monopoly. Fortunately for the Yanks, Flaherty knows his Standard and Poors as well as the Ave Maria.

Quickly, though, screenwriters Abraham Polonsky and Wendell Mayes forget the American-interest angle and instead thrust Flaherty into the role of chief fund-raiser for the Vatican.

Enter Flaherty's boyhood friend, another palooka from the lower east side but one who grew up to become a hoodlum only. And guess what: Varese (Joe Cortese) is connected to a Sicilian mafia chieftain who runs the local black market. In no time, Flaherty makes the don an offer he can't refuse, and black-market dollars come pouring into the church.

By now you realize this Flaherty is no ordinary priest, so it comes as little surprise when cupid's arrow next pierces his armor of cloth.

But it is with astonishment that we watch Flaherty — disguised as a Lt. Finnigan — fall for the first postulate he sees. Genevieve Bujold portrays the sun-to-be — a nymphomaniac who's joined the convent after suffering disastrous love affairs. Well, sister, we've got good news and bad news for you.

The good news is that this hunk, Flaherty, wants it bad. The bad news comes when you and your co-advices are gathered in St. Peter's to meet the pope and out of the closet steps our Father Flaherty.

OF COURSE that's not all that's bad about this film. Consider the following exchange between Flaherty and Clara, the postulate, after they've made love.

CLARA: Who are you?  
FLAHERTY: I'm your lover.  
CLARA: Are you a murderer?  
FLAHERTY: Not yet.

They kiss.

CLARA: I taste guilt.

FLAHERTY: Don't you taste love?

CLARA: Who are you?

— They kiss again, then dissolve to St. Peter's sequence. — Consider also the fact that Flaherty meets Clara — and they both meet the pope, who appears to be about 70 years old — sometime around 1945. The absent-minded Polonsky and Mayes soon forget about Clara, though, and jump ahead another 20 or 30 years. Reeve ages well, but the special effects department must have run out of makeup because the pope still looks about 70, and two other, central characters have aged very little. Now that's miraculous. "Monsignor," which opened Friday, also stars Jason Miller, Adolfo Celi and Fernando Rey. It is rated R, perhaps for Revelation of the Catholic Church, and contains material offensive to clear-minded viewers of every faith.

## what's at the movies

**AMITYVILLE II: THE POSSESSION (R).** Another family experiences the horrors of that demonic Long Island house, but this version proceeds with a strange and serious shift in tone and produces a very different effect than the initial movie.

**ANNIE (PG).** The successful Broadway musical is expanded and brought to the screen by director John Huston, with talented Alleen Quinn as Annie and Albert Finney and Carol Burnett.

**THE BOAT (R).** Realistic and powerful drama of experience of a German submarine crew during World War II.

**CHAN IS MISSING (PG).** Wayne Wang's black-and-white comedy mystery about two cabbies searching for a business partner who disappeared in San Francisco's Chinatown.

**THE CHOSEN (PG).** Dramatization of Chaim Potok's novel about father-son relationships, the interlocking lives of two teen-age friends and the faith that divides and unites them.

**DIVA (R).** New wave film from France is a comedy, a thriller and a romance. Written by Jean-Jacques Beineix, directed by Philippe Russellot.

**E.T. THE EXTRATERRESTRIAL (PG).** Steven Spielberg's best film yet, and probably the best film of the year, develops story of an alien being stranded on earth and befriended by a young boy.

**HOMEWORK (R).** Every young man needs a teacher, and some lessons must be taught with care is a theme of this movie with Joan Collins, Shell Kessler and Carrie Snodgrass.

**LE BEAU MARIAGE (PG).** Tale of a young woman who decides she's going to be married, picks her target and proceeds. Written and directed by Eric Rohmer, stars Beatrice Romand, Andre Dussollier and Arielle Dombasle.

### MOVIE RATING GUIDE

- G General audiences admitted.
- PG Parental guidance suggested. All ages admitted.
- R Restricted. Adult must accompany person under 18.
- X No one under 18 admitted.



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