

FR. GABRIELE AMORTH

FR. GABRIELE AMORTH

— Rome's Exorcist —

THE OFFICIAL BIOGRAPHY

D O M E N I C O A G A S S O

TRANSLATED BY BRET THOMAN, OFS

FOREWORD BY FR. CHAD RIPPERGER

TAN BOOKS
GASTONIA, NORTH CAROLINA

© 2021 Edizioni San Paolo s.r.l.
Piazza Soncino 5 – 20092 Cinisello Balsamo (Milano) –
ITALIA
www.edizionisanpaolo.it

English translation copyright © 2023 TAN Books

All rights reserved. With the exception of short excerpts used in critical review, no part of this work may be reproduced, transmitted, or stored in any form whatsoever, without the prior written permission of the publisher. Creation, exploitation and distribution of any unauthorized editions of this work, in any format in existence now or in the future—including but not limited to text, audio, and video—is prohibited without the prior written permission of the publisher.

Translated by Bret Thoman, OFS

Cover design by David Ferris—www.davidferrisdesign.com.

Cover image: Father Gabriele Amorth, The Vatican's Chief Exorcist - Rome, Italy - 04 Oct 2010. Image contributor Vandeville Eric/ABACA/Shutterstock. Used with permission.

ISBN: 978-1-5051-3158-1

Kindle ISBN: 978-1-5051-3159-8

ePUB ISBN: 978-1-5051-3160-4

Published in the United States by

TAN Books

PO Box 269

Gastonia, NC 28053

www.TANBooks.com

Printed in the United States of America

“And the seventy-two returned with joy, saying: Lord, the devils also are subject to us in thy name. And he said to them: I saw Satan like lightning falling from heaven. Behold, I have given you power to tread upon serpents and scorpions, and upon all the power of the enemy: and nothing shall hurt you. But yet rejoice not in this, that spirits are subject unto you; but rejoice in this, that your names are written in heaven.”

—Luke 10:17-20

C O N T E N T S

| | |
|---|-----|
| Publisher's Note..... | ix |
| Foreword..... | xi |
| Introduction: The Name of Evil | 1 |
| 1 Two Saintly Parents..... | 5 |
| 2 "Alberto" the Partisan..... | 15 |
| 3 An Agreement with Father Alberione | 21 |
| 4 From Pope Pius to Pope John | 31 |
| 5 Our Lady's Travel by Helicopter | 43 |
| 6 "You Take Care of It!" | 77 |
| 7 At the Cardinal's Home..... | 85 |
| 8 Peter and the Smoke of Satan | 95 |
| 9 "I Am Lucifer" | 105 |
| 10 "I Have Never Been Afraid" | 123 |
| 11 His Eminence Does Not Believe in Satan | 137 |
| 12 Our Lady on the Hill..... | 153 |
| 13 Killed by the Devil | 169 |
| 14 A Man in a Cassock | 191 |
| 15 A Very Stubborn Man, a Great Joker..... | 207 |
| 16 Saints for Friends..... | 221 |
| 17 Inheritance | 227 |
| 18 Exorcists Today | 233 |
| Bibliography..... | 239 |

PUBLISHER'S NOTE

TAN Books has been at the forefront of fighting the battle against the devil. From manuals on spiritual warfare, books on the saints, the Church's enemies, prayer, virtue, angels, heaven, purgatory, hell, the devil, and so much more, TAN Books seeks to equip you with the spiritual ammo to conquer sin and so defeat the devil. For the surest way to overcome the devil is by becoming a saint.

It is TAN Books' great honor to offer the official biography of Father Gabriele Amorth in English for the first time, a translation of Edizioni San Paolo's Italian version, *Don Amorth Continua, La biografia ufficiale*. The author gives a list of selected books he used to write this biography in the bibliography. In these pages, you will learn about Fr. Gabriele Amorth, the most renowned exorcist of the twentieth century, and how he became an exorcist. Even more importantly, you will discover a saintly soul, a priest who walked among saints, a priest who labored until his final breaths for the salvation of souls.

Father Amorth spent sixty-nine years in the Pauline order, which published the Italian version, so it is fitting that they publish his official biography. May Fr. Gabriele Amorth's extraordinary yet humble life inspire you in your battle against the devil, the flesh, and the world. May you follow his example of prayer and deep devotion to Our Lady.

The Publisher

FOREWORD

Many exorcists in the last twenty years have viewed Father Gabriele Amorth as a father of modern-day exorcism. This can also be said of Father Candido, but Father Amorth was the one that communicated the knowledge and wisdom of past generations of exorcists into the modern era. As this biography shows, his writings in this area provided and still provide an initial look into the realm of the spiritual battle. The *Rituale Romanum* of 1962 is still often the ritual used today by many exorcists, used by Father Amorth for a majority of his exorcisms. However, the second paragraph of chapter one of Title XII states, “In order to exercise his ministry rightly, he should resort to a great deal more study of the matter (which has to be passed over here for the sake of brevity), by examining approved authors and cases from experience.” Father Amorth is generally considered to be one of those approved authors today. Due to the accessibility of the writings in translation in English, he has become one of the main authors

studied by priests who recently and currently are training to be exorcists. Father Amorth is known for explicating sound practice in exorcisms. There are many approved authors scattered throughout the history of the Church, but Father Amorth, in his short books, provided many sound principles and practices for the exorcist to keep in mind; in that sense, we can consider him an “approved” author. Yet, Father Amorth also provided training for priests who would go to Rome and attend sessions he conducted over the possessed, providing a valuable formation to future exorcists. His continued writing and work in this area, following in the footsteps of Father Candido, bridged the gap between the pre-conciliar years and the decades after the council in the area of exorcism, which had seen a drastic decline in the Church’s practice of exorcism. This bridging of the gap would prove essential for the resurgence of the work of exorcism, at least in the United States. In so many ways, Father Amorth can truly be said to be a father, if not *the* father, of modern exorcism.

His life started with a normal childhood, which is an important quality in an exorcist for the sake of his psychological development. Exorcism is a battle, often waged in a person’s interior life, and so a normal childhood provides a psychological balance to the exorcist. Father Amorth was also grounded in solid work as a priest before becoming an exorcist. The rituals normally state that bishops should not pick a priest to do solemn exorcisms unless he is “properly distinguished for his piety, prudence, and integrity of life” (*Rituale Romanum*, Title XII, ch. 1, no. 1). Under normal circumstances, this will be observed in his priestly life and work over the course of years. It is time as serving as a priest which makes it possible to observe if he is prudent, pious, and has integrity. These three qualities, when possessed by

a priest, reveal his being grounded in his priesthood, which is key, since demonic attacks can be destabilizing to the priest if he is not well grounded. He will be one who has a clear identity as a priest, one who sacrifices regularly, can fast regularly, and is known as a man of consistent prayer. He will be seen as one who has no human respect and has a singular vision for God. Father Amorth is a good example in this regard, especially being known as a man of prayer.

He had a sense of his own nothingness, as the reader will discover in the coming pages. This is the hallmark of a good exorcist: to truly know that one is a useless instrument, as Christ tells us (see Lk 17:10). Any exorcist who is honest and who has done exorcisms even for a short period of time realizes that no demon obeys him, except insofar as he is obeying Christ. Without Christ, the priest can do nothing to compel a demon to anything. This humility was clearly demonstrated in the life and words of Father Amorth.

He was known for his sense of humor, and humor among exorcists is a necessary quality for many reasons, but above all for the reason of being able to strike a good balance in their view of themselves and of their work. The best exorcists are those who are serious in session, but can also be light hearted outside of session. There are times in session when the demons will do or say something that is very humorous, but the good exorcist can maintain a seriousness despite this diversionary tactic. Yet, not having a sense of humor can be a sign of being overly serious or taking oneself too seriously, which is dangerous in this line of work.

His devotion to the Blessed Virgin Mary is demonstrated throughout his life. In fact, one would doubt that Father Amorth would be able to view his work in any

other way than through the lens of Our Lady. Priests that do exorcisms for years, and in some cases decades of their priesthood, know that this work is impossible without her intervention. She is, after all, the one that crushes Satan's head, and any exorcist who has done exorcisms for any length of time can recount stories of Our Lady's involvement in their work. Father Amorth was clearly no exception. He is a great example to the power of Our Lady's protection throughout the years of his work. In many cases, of which Father Amorth is likely one of them, it is really Our Lady who chooses them to do this work. This is evident by signal graces in the priest's life and manifests itself in his devotion to her. Clearly, the consecration of Father Amorth's family to the Blessed Virgin during the time of war is an example of a signal grace. Our Lady's predilection and choice of him to serve in this role is even signaled by the demons themselves, who recount that he is protected by her.

If it is true that she chose him, it is even more clear in his life that he did not chose to be an exorcist. A good exorcist normally is not one who chooses this apostolate. Father Amorth seems almost flabbergasted that he was chosen to engage in the spiritual battle in a way and intensity that most others do not. However, once assigned, he dedicated himself to it. One of the reasons one could surmise that Our Lady chose him was due to his connection to publications. He made the work, and the necessity for it, known.

As the founder of the International Association of Exorcists, he provided a forum for the formation of priests in the area of spiritual warfare as well as an organization where exorcists can be in contact with each other for the sake of consultation. Some have questioned the number of exorcisms he did. By some estimates, it is between forty and seventy thousand. It sounds impossible, but it is not as

unimaginable as one might think. The average time to do the solemn rite of exorcism, from start to finish, is between twenty-five and thirty minutes, provided one does not stop to repeat a specific line that afflicts the demons during the session. When one hears forty to seventy thousand exorcisms, we are obviously not talking about the number of people, but the number of times that the priest recites the ritual. As Father Amorth points out, it often takes numerous sessions or exorcisms with the same individual, sometimes over the course of years, in order to liberate the individual. So it is entirely possible, in fact, one may say, it would be surprising if he had done exorcisms almost full time for thirty some years and not have done that many.

Father Amorth laments and suffered through a very common experience of virtually all exorcists: that is the dual battle of those who do not believe in Satan and the battle with Satan itself. This is by no means a recent phenomenon. Even Blessed Francisco Palau, who was an exorcist and a peritus at the First Vatican Council, gave Saint Mary Anthony Claret a few harsh words over the idea expressed by Saint Mary Anthony that diabolic problems are really just psychological problems. Obviously, many people who come to an exorcist suffer from psychological problems, but occurrences that are clearly preternatural can be explained in any adequate way by recourse to psychological analysis. Father Amorth suffered this dual battle, as the battle against Satan is a call to sacrifice, a call to prayer and fasting, to suffering attacks both upon one's person and in one's externals. But the second aspect of the dual battle is truly dealing with clergy and bishops who do not think Satan is real, who would prefer to think that Satan does not exist, because if he does, then the life of even the average priest shifts significantly. If a priest or bishop can convince himself that

Satan does not exist, that the faithful should not engage the battle even in their own lives, or that he as a priest or bishop has no real obligations to aid those in spiritual need who are under attack, then he can preserve his comfortable priesthood and life. While many bishops do believe and do engage in the battle, so few do. Part of this battle that an exorcist must endure is to come to knowledge of a case in a bishop's diocese, and yet, the bishop refuses to help or even hear about the case. Sometimes the bishops do not help out of simple incredulity, as one bishop once said to an exorcist, "I believe in the devil, just not in my diocese." Or in another instance, a bishop told an exorcist, "I have never given faculties for this in the twelve years I have been a bishop." The exorcist had to bite his tongue and not retort with the obvious response, "Well, your excellence, that is not a virtue." One of the most consoling and encouraging experiences an exorcist can witness is when the bishop himself does the exorcism, even if it is only a minor exorcism. One of the sufferings an exorcist must endure is knowing how powerful the fullness of the priesthood is in spiritual warfare and how few bishops truly engage in it. All of these things, Father Amorth bore in his lifetime.

Father Amorth's death is like many great figures in history, who despite having a human side, their passing left a sense of loss to us on this side. No doubt he is interceding, even for exorcists and the afflicted, as this is an ongoing battle, and so he is, in one sense, more powerful now through his intercession than perhaps he was even in this life. But all we can do is await for God to raise up other great men, who will gird the battle armor left for us by Christ, so that His presence in their strength, virtue, and knowledge is still seen to be with us. In the meantime, Father Amorth has left us a great patrimony in his writings to which exorcists now

and in the future can look as one of the “approved” authors. For those who knew Father Amorth, they can truly see in his life the Scripture passage: “I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course; I have kept the faith. As to the rest, there is laid up for me a crown of justice which the Lord the just judge will render to me in that day; and not only to me, but to them also that love his coming” (2 Tm 4:7–8). And one last passage, “For, when he hath been proved, he shall receive the crown of life which God hath promised to them that love him” (Jas 1:12). May Father Amorth intercede for all of the diabolically afflicted and for all exorcists.

Fr. Chad Ripperger, PhD

INTRODUCTION

THE NAME OF EVIL

“**T**ast out demons!” Jesus commanded the disciples in the Gospel. He personally confronted the devil for forty days in the desert. He resisted. He fought. He was victorious. Not even hunger could wear him down: “Turn these stones into bread,” Satan said as he tried time and again, tirelessly. What a victory it would have been to have triumphed over God Himself, incarnate in His Son Jesus. But Jesus did not give in to the persuasive tempter.

Though he was unsuccessful in the temptation of Jesus in the desert, the devil certainly did not give up. He continues—“forever and ever”—to test every person in the world. This is why he exists. His task, his “mission,” is to take away as many souls as possible from God, to snatch creatures away from their creator. How many people today, however, still believe in the existence of the devil, or in his works and victories? This is perhaps his greatest feat: convincing the world that he does not exist, that he has disappeared forever. Instead, he operates subtly, striking defenseless

creatures. They are defenseless because they are incredulous: What is there to defend against if evil no longer exists? In fact, the tempter has succeeded in convincing us all—or almost all of us—of his non-existence. He slinks down, hides, and negates himself in order to strike better, conquer, and enlarge his dominion all the more. He has managed to convince the many that he is little more than a fairy tale—like the big, bad wolf and the bogeyman used to get children to behave.

Perhaps worse, the Church herself seems to have forgotten the devil. After having focused on him for centuries, now, and with modernity run amok, she has abandoned the challenge. It is as if the Gospel did not exist, in its warning, insisting, and repeating again and again that the heart of every man—even of Peter and of Judas, two of the twelve closest to Jesus—can be conquered by the lord of evil. Scripture attests to the fact that anyone can be overcome, with disastrous results both to the individual and the whole of humanity. No. It seems that not even the Gospel is sufficient anymore—nor the many saints, popes, bishops, and priests who have all stood up to the evil one for over two thousand years.

We have eliminated the devil, sin, and ultimately death, as unpleasant, anachronistic, out-of-date themes. Dismissed as the stuff the Middle Ages, modern man no longer has time for such ancient nonsense. Instead, there are other far more exciting and thrilling challenges that inspire modern man. The concepts of good and evil themselves, moreover, have changed in today's mentality. What is good and what is evil? Who can say? Everything is relative. Everyone has the right to construct for himself one's own tailor-made sense of good and evil. And if doing so harms others, what does it matter? Is man free or not? Can

man do what he wants with his life on earth or not? Indeed, humanity is rushing toward a dark and frightening end—one we have already seen and experienced before—namely, *homo homini lupus* (a man is a wolf to another man).

It should be enough to have eyes to see. Is it not demonic that practically half the world is at war? Or that there are prisoners, refugees, the hungry and thirsty, the persecuted, and the tortured? Or that unspeakable violence is being inflicted against children, women, and the elderly? Is it not satanic that little ones are being killed in the womb, as are the sick who have no hope? Or that hatred breaks up families, that racism poisons souls, or that ideologies run rampant within individuals and nations?

“The smoke of Satan has entered the Church,” said Pope Saint Paul VI in the 1970s. That same smoke seems to have enveloped the entire world, intoxicated consciences, disordered minds, and destroyed human coexistence. Good resists, of course, and continues to resist. It often defeats and repels the formidable assaults of evil in its thousand forms. But what is at the root of evil? The action of the devil, now and forever. Pretending that he does not exist will not save us from his bullying, insistent, and pervasive actions. Therefore, taking the Gospel seriously, believing in Jesus Christ who died and descended to the dead and rose again, means becoming aware that evil has a name and a face: that of the devil. He is an unwelcome presence, of course, but real and tangible, forever and ever.

Fortunately, there are men in the Church who are willing to look directly at Satan, confront him, fight, and overcome him. They are the exorcists. They are priests who are meticulously trained for this terrible task. Their work requires taking on the prince of this world and driving him out as written in the Gospels, as Jesus commands. Often

unknown or little known, sometimes misunderstood or even derided, exorcists are a powerful weapon against the spread of the evil one, his conquest of hearts, and the victory of evil over good.

The following pages recount the human and spiritual ventures of the most famous exorcist of our era, Fr. Gabriele Amorth. For thirty long years, he carried out this crucial role with total dedication as long as his strength permitted. Not only did he go to war against the devil, he taught others to do so. He spoke and wrote about his ministry and involved countless people in his work. He spent his life urging Christians—including priests and even bishops—to believe in the existence and pervasiveness of the devil. He illustrated the modern manifestations of evil in all its forms—often captivating and striking.

Encouraged by the last three popes—Saint John Paul II, Benedict XVI, and Francis—he fought the good fight, kept the faith, and finished the race. He was a relentless enemy of the prince of this world, and he defended the cause of Jesus and His Church—at the same time one, holy, catholic, and apostolic, and also imperfect and sinful. If others are now fighting on that difficult battle front, it is certainly due to him. He restored visibility and nobility to the ancient practice of exorcism, drew young priests into the battle, raised awareness among the bishops, stood at the side of the faithful, and put us all on guard against the temptation to eliminate the devil. Anything less would grant the devil the highest victory: believing that he does not exist, letting down one's guard, and becoming estranged from God and the Church—from faith, hope, and charity.

1

TWO SAINTLY PARENTS

Gabriele Amorth was born in Modena (in Emilia Romagna, Northern Italy) on May 1, 1925. The government of Italy had been Fascist for almost three years. Benito Mussolini was then a young man from Forlì, a city in the same region. Previously a socialist, he took power without bloodshed on October 28, 1922 in the infamous march on Rome. It was not a triumphal march, but it was enough to convince both King Victor Emanuel III, the government led by Luigi Facta, Parliament, and the Italian people of the inevitability of change.

The postwar period was marked by protests, clashes, and violence between the reds and the blacks.¹ Order was needed, and the sanguine man from Romagna appeared as

¹ Colors denote political ideologies and can vary from region to region. The Italian political landscape cannot be reduced to a two-party system, such as the “red states” and “blue states” of American political parlance. The struggle for identity referenced here was between fascism (denoted as “blacks” from the color of the fascist uniforms) and socialism (the “reds,” or Soviet communism).

the savior of the homeland. All of Italy appeared ready to genuflect before Mussolini, to prostrate themselves, and to place themselves at his beck and call. As history unfolded, however, this was a monumental mistake of extraordinary import that would be paid for with tears, bloodshed, and ruin. In 1925, Fascism became victorious and the country was transformed into a dictatorship, bringing an end to the constitutional, liberal, and parliamentary state. On January 3, Mussolini gave a dramatic speech to Parliament where, subsequently, political parties and unions were suppressed, and newspapers were censored. The head of government became master of the country under the impotent—and partially complicit—gaze of the king of Italy. The Italians, with some culpability, entrusted the destiny of their country to one man, Mussolini.

Fascism, however, had no place in the Amorth family. Gabriele's father Mario was a lawyer and co-founder of Father Luigi Sturzo's *Partito Popolare* (Popular Party, or the People's Party) in 1919. The party appealed to the "free and strong" and called Catholics to action and political witness.² This movement arose long after the capture of Rome in 1870, which had marked an end to the temporal power of the papacy. The former archbishop of Milan, Cardinal Achille Ratti, was now seated on the chair of Saint Peter as Pope Pius XI. Times were changing, and the unification of Italy was an accepted historical fact.

The carnage of the First World War (1914 to 1918) drew warnings, prayers, and pleading for peace from two popes. Pius X prophetically foresaw the warning signs of the future "Great War," and Benedict XV used forceful words against

² The Popular Party was comprised of Roman Catholics who opposed communism.

“the useless massacre.” The tragic and violent postwar period prompted the Sicilian Fr. Luigi Sturzo and Mario Amorth to mobilize Catholics. The *Partito Popolare* called Italy’s Catholics to resistance so as to prevent the country from spiraling into an endless struggle between the new working class and entrenched nobility. Unfortunately, however, Father Sturzo’s *Partito Popolare* was not successful. It was swept away, along with others, by the winds of fascism.

Nonetheless, the “people” of the People’s Party and its Catholic ethos were not swept away—the lawyer, Mario Amorth, being among them. The son of a lawyer himself, Gabriele’s father was born in 1884. His wife, Albertina Tosi, two years his younger, was very active in the local parish. They had five sons: Leopoldo, a future lawyer who followed in the footsteps of his father and grandfather; Giovanni, a doctor; Luigi, a teacher; Giorgio, a magistrate; and finally, Gabriele, born in 1925.

Not much is known about Gabriele’s childhood and adolescence. Gabriele recounted simply, “I was born in Modena on May 1, 1925, into a very religious family. My parents were two saints. My four brothers (we were five boys) were all truly golden. We were very close.” Paolo Rodari offered a glimpse into Gabriele’s childhood which he recounts in his book *L’ultimo esorcista* (The Last Exorcist):

As a child, I used to go to Mass with my mamma and papà in Modena, where I was born. I often fell asleep on the floor, under the pews, at my parents’ feet. When I slept and remained silent without running back and forth through the aisles of the church, my mom would reward me, usually with a piece of candy. If, on the other hand, I was agitated and noisy, I got no reward. For me, these things were good and evil.

They were my whims and my mom's smiles, the jokes and caresses of my father, and tears and consolations.³

Gabriele reports that he wanted to become a priest at a young age. The faith and zeal that animated the Amorth household certainly nurtured his vocation: daily attendance at Mass with his mother, the holiness of his parents, and the goodness of his brothers.

The call came early. As Gabriele recounts, "I attended classical [high] school and, already at the age of thirteen, I began to think about the future, about the priesthood, and about religious life." He adds, "I have always been accustomed to obeying. The idea of becoming a priest came to me when I was twelve years old. It was 1937. In obedience to God's call, I considered it. I never felt drawn to other paths. Although I always had cordial relations with girls, I felt inclined to the priesthood. I had my crushes, but always left them there. In fact, this was useful to me. Due to this, I made a real choice between marriage and priesthood, and not a theoretical one."⁴ Gabriele recounts that he had a normal, lively, and carefree childhood, with no apparent mysterious signs about the future. Catholicism and the sacramental life were central in the Amorth home, something which would bear fruit much later. He states, "I had a clearer perception of evil when I confessed the first time. Then I understood that evil is serious and we must strive to correct ourselves. I was taught to confess weekly."⁵ His vocation was precocious, no doubt.

Gabriele wanted to be a priest but also had a normal childhood. He was involved in athletics, excelling

³ Amorth, *L'Ultimo Esorcista*, 16.

⁴ Amorth, 12.

⁵ Amorth, 16.

particularly in fencing and cycling. He demonstrated extraordinary skills of discipline, commitment, and seriousness, and was spiritually mature compared to others his age. He participated in Catholic Action and in the San Vincenzo Association in his parish, attended catechism, and even won a trip to Rome in 1936.⁶ He also served as diocesan president of Catholic Action youth and was later appointed group leader and deputy delegate of the aspirants. He exercised leadership from a very young age. He did well at the Muratori classical high school he attended in Modena, and graduated in 1943.

In the meantime, however, Fascism and Benito Mussolini were advancing in the worst possible ways. Allying himself with Hitler, *il Duce* (Mussolini) took Italy to war on June 10, 1940. Gabriele Amorth was only fifteen years old. The new terrifying carnage, even worse than the first war, would bloody the world for five terrible years. From 1940 to 1945, death, mourning, hunger, and despair ravaged Italy. World War II destroyed people and projects, cities and families, dreams and hopes. Even the church of San Vincenzo was struck by a bomb in 1944.

The war devastated the lives of millions of people. How deeply the war affected the young Gabriele is unknown, but the spiral of human violence and the extermination of millions of Jews in the Nazi concentration camps was a genocide of unimaginable proportions. For those who lived at that time, this was hell on earth. The truly demonic underpinnings of the

⁶ Catholic Action sought to imbue Catholic values into the broader, secular (and often anti-clerical) culture at the time. Devotion to San Vincenzo is common in Modena, where Father Amorth was raised. Saint Vincent was part of the Theban Legion who refused to offer sacrifices to the emperor and were consequently martyred (circa AD 286).

war became increasingly obvious in the abyss of cruelty and despair that has few precedents in the history of humanity.

The evils of war and political corruption form a backdrop for young Gabriele Amorth, who continued his studies without putting aside his goal of religious life. In the summer of 1942, with the war still raging, Gabriele was beginning his final year of high school. He went to Rome with his parish priest. As he told Paolo Rodari, "I felt inclined to community life, to life in some religious order."⁷ Because he was fond of several Passionist priests from his region, he specifically sought information about the Passionist Order. He wanted to enter a congregation but had no specific preference, as he did not yet have any direct knowledge of the orders.

That trip to Rome changed the course of his life. It was a decisive encounter, the first of many. The Passionists had no rooms available to offer Gabriele and his parish priest, but they were directed to Father Giacomo Alberione and his newly formed Order of St. Paul. Though the Paulines had no rooms there either, they permitted the pair to sleep in the infirmary. There, Gabriele Amorth met Father Alberione for the first time. Of short stature from the region of Piemonte, Father Alberione founded the Pauline Order with the mission of proclaiming the Gospel through modern media. That encounter would prove decisive for the future of the young Gabriele.

Gabriele confided in Father Alberione, known as the "apostle of the good press," of his desire to become a priest. As Saverio Gaeta recounts,

I heard [Alberione] speak then for the first time. He was saying things that made me believe I was in the

⁷ Amorth, *L'Ultimo Esorcista*, 12.

presence of a man of God. Thinking he could help me resolve my questions, I asked him to pray for me and ask the Lord what I should do. He promised me that the following morning he would celebrate Holy Mass for me. I showed up to serve (at 4:30 in the morning!). I figured that by seeing me present, he would remember me. After Mass, I went to talk to him and he limited himself to a single sentence: “Enter St. Paul’s.” Without delay I was satisfied, and I truly accepted that answer as coming from the Lord.⁸

The following year, 1943, Father Alberione was passing through Modena and was hosted by the parish priest of San Pietro. Gabriele was aware of the founder’s plan to build a large sanctuary in Rome dedicated to Our Lady, as a gift of thanksgiving for Mary’s intercessory prayer for saving the lives of all Paulines scattered throughout the world during the war. Father Amorth later said:

In my family, we were five brothers, all military age. I asked the First Master [Ita: *Primo Maestro*, that is, Fr. Alberione] to extend this vow to my family, as well.

⁸ Gaeta, *L’eredità segreta di don Amorth*, 9–10. He described his encounter with journalist and writer Elisabetta Fezzi in *La mia battaglia con Dio contro Satana* (My Battle with God Against Satan): “At seventeen, in my second year of high school, I met Don Giacomo Alberione, the founder of the Pauline Family, who gave me the final nudge. I asked him: ‘So, what does the Lord want from me?’ I wanted God to tell me what to do. Instead, thanks to [Alberione], I understood that it was up to me to decide. All the same, God intervened and Don Alberione told me: ‘I will celebrate Mass for you tomorrow morning.’ After Mass, he communicated to me: ‘That you enter into [the Society of] St. Paul!’ ‘Okay,’ I replied. But I was in second [year of high school], so I proposed: “I will finish my third year and then enter.’ Fezzi, *La Mia Battaglia Contro Satana*, 16.

He accepted, assuring my mother as well, who knew nothing about my intentions for the future. All five of us experienced things, but we came out of the conflict safe and sound. My mother kept repeating until her death that we were saved thanks to that intercession, and she always sent offerings of thanksgiving to the Queen of Apostles sanctuary (built in Via Alessandro Severo in Rome as a fulfillment of that vow).⁹

This encounter would weigh decisively in Gabriele Amorth's choice of religious life.

Here are found the early seeds of Gabriele's devotion to the Blessed Mother and the power of Marian consecration. As Father Amorth recalls:

I was aware of the fact that Don Alberione had consecrated his spiritual children to the Queen of Apostles with a vow so that Our Lady would protect them all. I did so too. I asked Don Alberione to consecrate me and all my family members to the Queen of the Apostles. The war started, and the war ended. And, like all my brothers, I was not injured. Not one bullet ever touched me or my brothers. Despite enduring terrible dangers, we all came out unscathed. This meant a lot to me. Until just before I was ordained, I still had a doubt in my mind not so much about priestly ordination itself as about the place where God wanted me to become a priest. I wondered, "Am I really doing the right thing by entering the Paulines? Is this really where God wants me? Or does he want me somewhere else?" My doubts were removed on the day of

⁹ Gaeta, *L'eredità segreta di don Amorth*, 10–11.

my ordination. My mother greeted Don Alberione and said to him, “Thanks to the consecration you made to Our Lady, my Gabriele and his brothers were saved. I cried for joy.” With that simple statement, my mother confirmed to me that Our Lady had protected me thanks to the consecration of Don Alberione, and that she wanted me in the Paulines. Our Lady saved me from death during the war so that I would become a priest. And I became a priest with the Paulines.¹⁰

Henceforth, the close relationship with the Virgin Mary became the cornerstones of Gabriele Amorth’s entire life. That distant personal consecration to the Mother of Jesus would accompany him forever. He once quipped, “Why do today’s mothers not consecrate their children to Our Lady too? It doesn’t take much: a simple prayer made by a priest with this intention. All children should be consecrated to the Immaculate Heart of Our Lady. They would enjoy unique protection.” That simple gesture of consecration, for Father Amorth, “means erecting an invisible but impenetrable protective shield around the person.”¹¹ This impenetrable and protective shield will accompany him for the remainder of his priestly life.

¹⁰ Amorth, *L’Ultimo Esorcista*, 24–25.

¹¹ Amorth, 25.