

Gabriele AMORTH and Marcello STANZIONE, *The Devil Is Afraid of Me. The Life and Work of the World's Most Famous Exorcist*, translated from the Italian by Charlotte J. FASI. Manchester NH, Sophia Institute Press, 2019, 13,5 × 21,5 cm, ix-146 p., ISBN 978-1-622826-247

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prosélytisme, de tout triomphalisme et de tout esprit conquérant. À l'image de Pierre et Jean, lorsqu'ils rencontrent l'infirme de la Belle Porte¹³, le christianisme n'a « rien » à offrir sinon le Nom de Jésus, c'est-à-dire sa personne. L'évangélisation ne peut se faire que par « imprégnation de la rosée évangélique » (p. 18) et le salut n'est envisageable que comme « libération personnelle, communautaire et collective » (p. 194). Que l'Église devienne « invisible » n'est pas un drame pourvu que les chrétiens apportent au monde le témoignage de leur bonheur et que leur présence soit configurée selon une anthropologie trinitaire, c'est-à-dire relationnelle (p. 211).

L'auteur développe encore plus ce modèle trinitaire relationnel dans son dernier chapitre consacré à la communauté chrétienne. S'il dénonce à plusieurs reprises les travers de l'Église, il défend avec une énergie encore plus grande la nécessité de la communauté chrétienne, seule à même de refléter dans son tissu relationnel le mystère trinitaire. Cela rejoint aussi, dit-il, les intuitions de la culture andine pour qui la communauté précède toujours l'individu. Bien entendu, la communauté que décrit le moine bénédictin est un lieu de « partage des vulnérabilités » (p. 264). Ce partage permet la rencontre de la grâce et des humains fragiles, pour la plus grande joie de ces derniers.

Voilà donc un livre à la fois dense et tonique qui aligne des propositions que les lecteurs et lectrices pourront juger audacieuses ou scandaleuses, inspirantes ou choquantes selon le « lieu » théologique où ils ont les pieds. Il y a de fortes chances que le sens de la formule dont fait preuve Simon-Pierre Arnold et sa manière hardie de forger de nouvelles expressions les conduise à revisiter au moins un peu leur manière d'envisager Dieu, la foi ou, qui sait, à soumettre leur propre expérience croyante au filtre de la kénose :

L'expérience croyante, c'est l'humble liberté d'une recherche incessante habitée par une profonde indignation, une insatisfaction lancinante et une conviction active sur l'humain, le monde et leur mystère au-delà du visible. C'est le refus de tout esclavage, y compris l'esclavage religieux (p. 89).

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It is said that if a carpenter's only tool is a hammer, everything will look soon like a nail.

Gabriele Amorth (1925-2016), the subject and co-author of the recently published *The Devil is Afraid of Me*, was a spiritual craftsman who served as the principal exorcist for the Vatican and the Roman diocese for over thirty years. In the course

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of plying his craft Father Amorth performed an astonishing 60,000 exorcisms – often performing multiple exorcisms on the same person.

But the Catholic Rite of Exorcism was by no means the only supernatural tool at Father Amorth's disposal. To the contrary, Father Amorth emerges from this book as a humble compassionate, thoughtful, witty and well-rounded priest and a prolific author; Amorth also had a deep commitment to the full range of sacraments, sacramentals, prayers and practices traditionally thought to edify the soul. In light of Father Amorth's earthy common sense, good humor, modesty and versatile devotional practices, he is a particularly credible witness to the bewildering events he encountered while performing exorcisms.

In fact, Father Amorth acknowledged that most of the persons for whom he conducted the Rite of Exorcism were probably *not* in fact possessed by a demonic entity; they were simply spiritually troubled individuals who earnestly requested an exorcism. In such cases Father Amorth was convinced that exorcism can do no harm and often has a salutary effect, if only as a diagnostic tool in determining the source of a penitent's problem. Moreover, especially in situations where he found it doubtful that demonic possession was the root cause difficulty, he urged the afflicted persons to seek medical or psychological guidance and to reexamine their prayer life.

However, the interviews of Father Amorth that make up much of this book include descriptions of a handful exorcisms during which Amorth concluded that a devil had indeed taken possession of a human being. In these interviews (conducted by co-author Marcello Stanzione – an Italian priest who has written voluminously on the subject of angels – both heavenly and fallen) Father Amorth recounts some strange and frightening events that seem to evade conventional explanation:

- The sudden emergence in an afflicted person of the ability to converse fluently in languages that he or she had never been exposed to.
- Exhibitions of extreme physical strength, *e.g.*, a slight young girl undergoing an exorcism is able to shove Father Amorth's stocky male assistants to floor.
- A man undergoing an exorcism literally spits nails at Father Amorth after the nails suddenly materialize in his mouth, and then the man levitates three feet above his bed.
- The room in which an exorcism is being conducted displays an instantaneous and dramatic drop in temperature – to the point that ice-cycles suddenly appear on the windows and walls.

Even more disturbing are Father Amorth's responses to questions about satanic activity within the walls of the Vatican:

[Stanzione:] Is the devil also in the Vatican?

[Amorth:] Yes, there are many members of satanic sects also in the Vatican.

[Stanzione:] Who are they? Are they priests or simple laymen?

[Amorth:] There are priests, Monsignors and even Cardinals!

Due to confidentiality pledges and seals (confessional or otherwise), Father Amorth declined to reveal the sources of his belief that the devil has adherents among Vatican clergy and prelates. But, as discussed above, because of the indicia of credibility that I believe attach to Father Amorth, his assertions on this subject should not be lightly dismissed.

And as also mentioned above, one of the badges of credibility that Father Amorth bore was his wit and sense of humor. As I trial lawyer I have often had to assess the credibility of various witnesses (including the credibility of my own clients), and it is my experience that liars are usually humorless – probably because they are so intent on keeping their fabricated story straight that they have no time or mental energy to joke about it. Father Amorth's sense of humor is evident in this book's rendition of Amorth's dialogues with some of the demons he has exorcised. One such demon accused Father of being a glutton, and Amorth's quick and pithy retort was, "Well, what's it to you?" On another occasion a devil told Father Amorth that the citizens of Hell are afraid of him (as indeed the title of this book proclaims) because he prays fervently and is therefore in a special way under the protection of Christ and His Blessed Mother. But Father Amorth has also reported that Satan is afraid of him "because I am uglier than Satan!"

Another chapter in this book contains a skillful biography of Satan that explores the gradual disclosure of his true nature through *Genesis*, *Job*, the Gospel narratives concerning Satan's temptation of Christ and concerning Christ's work in expelling evil spirits, St. Paul's declaration in *Ephesians* 6:12 that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against (...) the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places," and *Revelation's* account of Satan's rebellion against God and his defeat by Michael the Archangel. Father Amorth completes this sketch of Satan with his testimony, based on his vast experience as an exorcist, that Satan and his minions now roam the earth seeking to convince human beings to join in his war against God and sometimes hijacking human bodies

But one of the troubling issues not fully developed in this book is *why God permits* devils to commit such depredations upon the human race. This is especially puzzling because Father Amorth reports that although Satan will frequently take up residence in people who seem to have beckoned him by dabbling in occult practices (Ouija boards, tarot etc.), he will also sometimes afflict those who are earnestly striving to be virtuous and holy. In my own thought, part of the answer resides with the economy of free will – God's gifts of free will and supernatural powers to Satan were great goods, but such gifts by their very natures cannot be given without also creating the possibility that they will be abused.

It might have been interesting for the authors to have more deeply explored this question, but their goal was obviously to broadcast a practical and credible warning concerning an old but still strange and dangerous force that is adrift among us – not a work of speculative philosophy or theology. With regard to the former goal they have succeeded admirably.

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