

The Pope's Exorcist

The Pope's Exorcist is a 2023 supernatural horror film directed by Julius Avery from a screenplay by Michael Petroni and Evan Spiliotopoulos, based on the 1990 book *An Exorcist Tells His Story* and the 1992 book *An Exorcist: More Stories* by Father Gabriele Amorth.^[6] The film stars Russell Crowe as Amorth, with Daniel Zovatto, Alex Essoe, and Franco Nero in supporting roles.

Production began in 2020 when Screen Gems purchased the rights to Amorth's story. After a directorial replacement and script revisions, filming occurred in Ireland from August to October 2022.

The Pope's Exorcist was released in several countries beginning on April 5, 2023, and in the United States on April 14.^[7] The film received mixed reviews from critics and grossed \$77 million worldwide.

Plot

In 1987, Father Gabriele Amorth, the Pope's personal exorcist, an earthy, scooter-riding, humorous, practical man, visits an Italian village where a man is seemingly possessed by a demon. With the local priest, Amorth enters the room where the man is tied up. While exorcising him, using a Saint Benedict Medal sacramental, Amorth taunts the demon, challenging it to possess a pig; when it does, the pig is killed with a shotgun.

This incident gets Amorth in trouble with a Church tribunal, since he acted without permission from superiors. One tribunal member is a friendly African Bishop, Lumumba, but another is a vicious American Cardinal, Sullivan, skeptical of demonic possession. Amorth replies that evil does exist and that he did not perform an actual exorcism but rather, some psychological theater to help the mentally ill man. Disgusted, Amorth walks out of the tribunal.

The Pope assigns Amorth to visit a possessed boy named Henry in Spain. Henry, his mother Julia, and his rebellious teenage sister Amy had traveled from America to take possession of a mysterious old Spanish abbey, Julia's husband's sole bequest to his family after he died in a car accident where Henry was present. The traumatized Henry has not spoken since the accident. Following a sinister fire, workers who were restoring the abbey so the family

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Theatrical release poster

Directed by	<u>Julius Avery</u>
Screenplay by	<u>Michael Petroni</u> <u>Evan Spiliotopoulos</u>
Story by	<u>R. Dean McCreary</u> <u>Chester Hastings</u> <u>Jeff Katz</u>
Based on	<i>An Exorcist Tells His Story</i> and <i>An Exorcist: More Stories</i> by <u>Father Gabriele Amorth</u>
Produced by	<u>Doug Belgrad</u> <u>Michael Patrick Kaczmarek</u> <u>Jeff Katz</u>

could sell it and leave. Henry starts behaving bizarrely, and supernatural events unfold; serum chemistry panels and MRI show nothing abnormal.

Diabolically possessed, Henry requests a priest; the local Father Tomas Esquibel arrives, but Henry obscenely derides him. Amorth arrives and enlists Esquibel as an assistant, though Esquibel is untrained as an exorcist. Esquibel has heard of Amorth but not read Amorth's books; Amorth believes they are good books. Amorth advocates the importance of prayer, though Esquibel makes mistakes as an assistant exorcist, including strangling Henry when Henry antagonizes him, mocking him for his sins.

The duo attempt to exorcise Henry, without success, as he utters blasphemous phrases during the rite. Henry's demon even possesses Amy at times. Amorth finds Julia has not been a religious believer since childhood. Still, he convinces her to pray after she reveals that she believed that her guardian angel helped her in her youth.

In Rome, the Pope becomes ill while reading documents about the Spanish case and is hospitalized. Amorth finds a well on the abbey grounds going down to a complex sealed off by the Church as demonically dangerous. He learns that a founder of the Spanish Inquisition, an exorcist, was possessed, which let him infiltrate the Church and do many evils. Amorth also finds the Church covered this up and eventually discovers the name of Henry's demon, Asmodeus, which will assist the exorcism.

Amorth and Esquibel participate in the sacrament of Confession and Absolution, mutually confessing and absolving each other of their sins: that after Amorth, an Italian partisan, survived World War II and vowed to serve God in gratitude, a mentally ill woman asked for Amorth's help, and died by suicide when he did not help her due to pride; and Esquibel fornicated with a young woman he did not later marry. The two ready themselves; Amorth instructs Esquibel to wear a Miraculous Medal necklace. During the exorcism, they have horrible visions of the women whom they failed. The exorcism succeeds only when Amorth offers himself to be possessed, which chimes with Asmodeus's previously stating that he wants to destroy Amorth.

Amorth tries to hang himself, but the demon doesn't allow it, preferring that Amorth infiltrate and destroy the Church. However, Esquibel helps Amorth drive away the demon and demonic appearances resembling the two women who troubled the men, successfully banishing Asmodeus back to Hell. The Pope does recover, as does Henry while the Vatican purchases and reconsecrates the abbey.

Starring	<u>Russell Crowe</u> <u>Daniel Zovatto</u> <u>Alex Essoe</u> <u>Franco Nero</u>
Cinematography	Khalid Mohtaseb
Edited by	Matt Evans
Music by	Jed Kurzel
Production companies	<u>Screen Gems</u> 2.0 Entertainment Loyola Productions
Distributed by	<u>Sony Pictures</u> <u>Releasing</u>
Release dates	April 5, 2023 (International) April 14, 2023 (United States)
Running time	103 minutes ^[1]
Countries	United States United Kingdom Spain ^[2]
Language	English
Budget	\$18 million ^[3]
Box office	\$77 million ^{[4][5]}

The triumphant duo visit Rome and find Sullivan has taken leave in Guam, being replaced by Lumumba. Amorth and Esquibel are admitted to a special Church archive; Lumumba tells them they will be visiting 199 other evil sites,^[8] with the help of a map Amorth discovered at the abbey, to combat the Devil; Amorth jokes that he and Esquibel are going to Hell.

Cast

- Russell Crowe as Father Gabriele Amorth^[9]
- Daniel Zovatto as Father Esquibel^[9]
- Alex Essoe as Julia Vasquez^[9]
- Franco Nero as the Pope^[9]
- Peter DeSouza-Feighoney as Henry Vasquez^[9]
- Laurel Marsden as Amy Vasquez^[9]
- Cornell John as Bishop Lumumba^[10]
- Ryan O'Grady as Cardinal Sullivan
- Carrie Munroe as Adella
- Bianca Bardoe as Rosaria
- Ralph Ineson as the voice of Asmodeus^[11]

Production

Development

In October 2020, Screen Gems acquired the rights to the story of Father Gabriele Amorth with Ángel Gómez hired to direct.^[12] Chester Hastings and R. Dean McCreary were attached to write the script, while Michael Patrick Kaczmarek, Jeff Katz, and Edward "Eddie" Siebert were set to produce the film.^[13] In June 2022, Julius Avery boarded the film as director along with producer Doug Belgrad of 2.0 Entertainment.^[14] Subsequent script revisions were provided by Michael Petroni, Evan Spiliotopoulos, and Chuck MacLean.^[15]

Casting

In June 2022, Russell Crowe was cast as Amorth.^[16] The following month, Alex Essoe and Daniel Zovatto joined the cast.^[17] In September, Franco Nero was cast as the Pope, while Laurel Marsden, Cornell S. John, and Peter DeSouza-Feighoney were added to the cast.^[10] Ralph Ineson voices the demon.^[11]

Filming

Principal photography took place from August to October 2022 in Dublin and Limerick, Ireland and Rome, Italy.^{[18][19][20]} Scenes were also filmed with Crowe in Trinity College in Dublin.^[21]

Release

The Pope's Exorcist was released in India on April 7, 2023.^[22] It was released in the United States on April 14, 2023, by Sony Pictures Releasing.^[23]

The film was released on digital formats on May 2, followed by a [Blu-ray](#) and [DVD](#) release on June 13.^[24] The film was later streamed on [Netflix](#) starting August 16, 2023, where it ranked as the number one film in America for nine straight days.^[25]

Reception

Box office

The Pope's Exorcist grossed \$20 million in the United States and Canada, and \$57 million in other territories, for a worldwide total of \$77 million.^{[4][5]}

In the United States and Canada, *The Pope's Exorcist* was released alongside *Renfield*, *Mafia Mamma*, *Sweetwater*, and *Suzume*, and was projected to gross between \$4–10 million from 3,178 theaters in its opening weekend.^{[3][26]} The film made \$3.5 million on its first day, including \$850,000 from Thursday night previews.^[27] It went on to debut to \$9.2 million, finishing second behind holdover *The Super Mario Bros. Movie*.^{[28][29]} The film made \$3.3 million in its sophomore weekend (dropping 63%), finishing in seventh.^[30]

In other territories, the film was released a week ahead of its U.S. debut, grossing \$12 million from 43 markets.^[31] In its second weekend, the film expanded to 51 markets, earning \$10.4 million.^[32] *The Pope's Exorcist* grossed \$5.7 million from 53 markets in its third weekend.^[33]

Critical response

On the review aggregator website [Rotten Tomatoes](#), 49% of 105 critics' reviews are positive, with an average rating of 5.1/10. The website's consensus reads: "Dominus Crowe! *The Pope's Exorcist* is standard-issue holy horror in most respects, but its star's sanctified performance will be the answer to some viewers' prayers."^[34] [Metacritic](#), which uses a [weighted average](#), assigned the film a score of 45 out of 100, based on 19 critics, indicating "mixed or average" reviews.^[35] Audiences surveyed by [CinemaScore](#) gave the film an average grade of "B-" on an A+ to F scale,^[29] while those polled by [PostTrak](#) gave the film a 79% positive score.^[28]

Tamlin Magee at *The Guardian* noted, "Most professions are flattered by the attentions of Hollywood. Yet a body representing the real-life practitioners depicted in new Russell Crowe horror *The Pope's Exorcist* have condemned the film as 'unreliable ... splatter cinema'. ... In a statement issued last month, the [International Association of Exorcists](#) (IAE) called the title of the film 'pretentious' and claimed that its *Da Vinci Code*-esque conspiratorial plot poses 'unacceptable doubt' to the public as to who 'the real enemy is, the devil or ecclesiastical power'."^[36]

Paul Asay at *Plugged In*, a Christian film review publication, praised the film for its themes of sacrifice and extolling the virtue of love; he wrote that *The Pope's Exorcist* "may actually plant seeds of spiritual growth in the lives of some".^[37]

Crowe's performance has received mixed reviews from critics. Chris Vognar of *Rolling Stone* positively reviewed his performance, writing that "Crowe brings an imposing physicality and winking charm to go with Amorth's gravity."^[38] Kayleena Pierce-Bohen of *Screen Rant* was similarly positive, writing that

"even if he's in something subpar, his screen presence is undeniable."^[39] However, several reviewers, including Pierce-Bohen and Luke Thompson of *A.V. Club*, criticized Crowe's Italian accent.^{[40][41]}

Accolades

Award / Film Festival	Date of ceremony	Category	Recipient(s)	Result	Ref.
<u>Golden Raspberry Awards</u>	<u>March 9, 2024</u>	<u>Worst Actor</u>	<u>Russell Crowe</u>	Nominated	<u>[42]</u>
		<u>Worst Supporting Actor</u>	<u>Franco Nero</u>	Nominated	

Sequel

In April 2023, a sequel was announced to be in early development. Crowe is expected to reprise his role.^[43]

See also

[Catholicism portal](#)

[Christianity portal](#)

[Film portal](#)

- [The Devil and Father Amorth](#)
- [Exorcism in Christianity](#)
- [Exorcism in the Catholic Church](#)

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External links

- Official website (<https://www.thepopes-exorcist.movie/>) 
- *The Pope's Exorcist* (<https://www.imdb.com/title/tt13375076/>) at IMDb
- *The Pope's Exorcist* (https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_popes_exorcist) at Rotten Tomatoes

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