



**MICHEL PICCOLI: A FEARLESS TALENT**

# Habemus Papam – We Have a Pope

## **Habemus Papam – We Have a Pope**

*Director:* Nanni Moretti

*Production Companies:* Sacher Film, Rai Cinema, Fandango, Le Pacte, France 3 Cinéma, Sofica Coficup

*In collaboration with:* Rai Cinema

*In association with:* Canal+, France Télévisions

*Made with the participation of:* Centre national du cinéma et de l'image animée – CNC, Sofica Coficup – a Backup Films fund

*Made with the contribution of:*

Eurimages Conseil de l'Europe

*Presented by:* Nanni Moretti, Domenico Procacci

*Producers:* Jean Labadie, Domenico Procacci, Nanni Moretti

*International Sales:* Wild Bunch

*Unit Manager:* Fabrizio Amato

*Location Manager:* Alessandra Pascucci

*Post-production Co-ordinator:* Dario De Vito

*Story and Screenplay:* Nanni Moretti,

Francesco Piccolo, Federica Pontremoli

*Director of Photography:* Alessandro Pesci

*Camera Operator:* Fabrizio Vicari

*Stills Photography:* Philippe Antonello

*Visual Effects:* Storyteller

*Editor:* Esmeralda Calabria

*Art Director:* Paola Bizzari

*Set Dresser:* Laura Casalini

*Costume Designer:* Lina Nerli Taviani

*Key Make-up:* Enrico Iacoponi

*Key Hair Stylist:* Carlo Barucci

*Music:* Franco Piersanti

*Production Sound Mixer:* Alessandro Zanon

*Sound Editors:* Marta Billingsley,

Francesca Genevois

*Cast:*

Michel Piccoli (*Cardinal Melville, pope elect*)

Nanni Moretti (*Bruzzi*)

Renato Scarpa (*Cardinal Gregori*)

Jerzy Stuhr (*spokesman*)

Franco Graziosi (*Cardinal Bollati*)

Camillo Milli (*Cardinal Pescardona*)

Dario Cantarelli (*member of theatrical company*)

Roberto Nobile (*Cardinal Cevasco*)

Gianluca Gobbi (*Swiss guard*)

Margherita Buy (*psychoanalyst*)

Cecilia Dazzi

Ulrich von Dobschütz (*Cardinal Brummer*)

Manuela Mandracchia

Rossana Mortara

Teco Celio

Roberto De Francesco

Chiara Causa

Camilla Ridolfi

Leonardo Della Bianca

Kevin Murray

Erik Merino

Mauro Casanica

Peter Boom

Lucia Mascino

Giovanni Ludeno

Mbosho Nganzi

Francesco Lagi

Luis Rios

Maurizio Mannoni

Massimo Verdastro

Tony Laudadio

Londa Sita Dieudonne

Alfredo Cairo

Mario Santella

'My heart is blighted, and withered like grass; I forget to eat my food. I lie awake; I have become like a bird alone on a roof.' With these words, taken from Psalm 102, Nanni Moretti's erudite psychoanalyst Bruzzi attempts to convince an audience of cardinals that the Bible discusses depression. Certainly this prayer for an afflicted man eloquently captures the symptoms of the newly elected Pope, who himself claims to be suffering from 'psychological sinusitis'. But Bruzzi's words fall on deaf ears; after all, he is told, 'The soul and the subconscious cannot possibly coexist.'

Even at the end of Moretti's *Habemus Papam* it's not entirely clear if the Supreme Pontiff, formerly known as Cardinal Melville, is suffering from a nervous breakdown, an existential crisis or a loss of faith. But as he awaits presentation to the waiting world, his anguished howl for help reveals that, soul or subconscious, he is a man in torment. Fleeing the faithful for the crowded streets of Rome, convinced that he lacks the gifts God sees in him, he wanders aimlessly and anonymously in search of clarity. Meanwhile, confined to quarters until the Catholic leader can be found and announced to his public, the cardinals and Bruzzi – who has unwittingly found himself party to events – tussle over evolution and creationism.

The two narrative strands offer farce on the one hand, tragedy on the other. In the Vatican, the supremely confident man of science chides the craggy, jowly cardinals for their overreliance on frothy coffees and prescription meds, corralling them into a volleyball tournament. Outside its walls, the anxious man of God weaves his way along the edge of a spiritual precipice, delighting in a performance of Chekov's *The Seagull* yet despairing of any long-term potential for personal flight. Yet in the wake of Moretti's previous effort, the Berlusconi-baiting satire *The Caiman* (2006), some have lambasted *Habemus Papam*'s approach to organised religion as toothless.

One can see why, as this is an altogether more ambivalent film – one that seems as much (if not more) a meditation on the guilt, regret and shame that come with age and acquired wisdom as a pillorying of orthodox hypocrisy. But isn't that the point? As the votes for Pope are cast, a cacophony of prayers echoes through the Vatican's cavernous halls, as each of the cardinals desperately pleads that he *not* be the chosen one. Time and again the refrain 'I can't' is uttered, and even Bruzzi must eventually admit his fallibility.

At the film's beautifully choreographed and extremely sinister climax, Melville accepts, with devastating grace, that his fate is inescapable, and faces his demons – and his public – with dignity. It's a bittersweet finale, all the more distressing for the film's levity elsewhere, but it's one that rises above cheap shots and, through its very uncertainty about what it wants to say, what it *is*, offers a kind of emotional honesty.

As Melville, 85-year-old Michel Piccoli – once so very virile and lusty – is racked with self-doubt, his Giaconda smile belied by the darting, desperate eyes above it. Kindly, considered, *decent*, he is a far cry from the corrupt clergymen who populate so many caustic satires on the Catholic Church. This is someone whose fall from grace seems entirely undeserved, and who is all the more pitiful for it. Dwarfed by the sheer scale of his spectacular surroundings, crumpling under the twin burdens of expectation and history, Melville quite literally carries the weight of the world on his shoulders. Small wonder he's crippled by it.

Catherine Wheatley, *Sight and Sound*, January 2012

Vega Graziano  
Harold Bradley  
Don Somasiry Jayamanne  
Enrico Ianniello  
Jelle Bruinsma  
Salvatore Miscio  
Francesco Brandi  
Giulia Giordano  
Leonardo Maddalena  
Salvatore Dell'aquila  
Italy 2011  
105 mins

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## Nanni Moretti on 'Habemus Papam – We Have a Pope'

*I wondered if you wrote the script specifically with Michel Piccoli in mind?*

The idea came first. Piccoli was my first choice, but he did not vitiare the way the script was written. The script was finished before Piccoli was contacted.

*So why was Piccoli your first choice?*

I really appreciate actors who are very skilful at their job but do not obliterate themselves in the role they are playing. Side by side you ought to be able to see a great performance and the truth behind the character – and that is provided by the truth of the actor.

*Did you have a specific pope in mind when writing the film?*

No. There are no echoes of real popes. What this fictitious pope has in common with all the stories we've heard about popes' elections is the fact that – according to the voting cardinals and to the new popes themselves – the moment the name was made public was immediately followed by a sense of unworthiness [felt by the elected pope] and of the enormity of the role that person was going to have to play for the rest of their life.

*What has been the reaction to the film in Italy?*

All the diatribes happened before the movie was released. It sometimes happens with my films that people claim to be able to talk about them before they see them. And then some of the people who maybe have liked my previous movies didn't like it, but there hasn't been a split between believers and non-believers.

*Anybody who grew up Catholic or in a Catholic country has ideas about the pope. Was this film a receptacle for all those doubts and anxieties in your own life about the pope?*

I've made 11 films in my career, and of those 11, two have religious connotations: *The Mass Is Finished* [*La messa è finita*, 1985], in which I played a priest, and this one. To be truthful, I don't know why this theme has recurred at such a high percentage especially when you consider that I'm a non-believer. Some believers have unresolved issues that make them tackle the subject with a degree of animosity, but I have a total detachment towards the Catholic church, so therefore I can allow myself to give the pope a humane character.

*What sort of research did you do into the behaviour of the cardinals?*

Obviously there is no video documentation. It is one of the few secrets left in the world that is beyond the reach of the media. What I was really interested in finding out was how the processions worked, and what robes they wore, so that within that framework of truth I could put my own story. My experience as a viewer has always altered my viewpoint as a director: seeing something that you don't like, you say to yourself, 'I don't want to do that.' I know that viewers have seen the mechanism of voting for the pope portrayed as a myriad of intrigues, lobbying and plotting. I was not interested in that.

*Is it that ability to see yourself as an ordinary filmgoer that helps you determine how far to push the absurdity in your films?*

Sometimes when I tackle a new film I know I'm interested in taking a more 'classical' approach. In writing *We Have a Pope*, for instance, the storyline had to be as linear as other movies. It is requested and required that the viewer goes along with it, but it is up to the skill of the film director to lead. In some of my movies – *Palombella Rossa* [1989], for instance – I've pushed the absurdity very hard. In this movie I liked the idea of leading the viewer along and then unsettling them slightly to take a completely different direction.

Interview by Nick James, *Sight and Sound*, January 2012