Film Review: Fallible Human Beings Bless ‘We Have a Pope’

Submitted by PatrickMcD [1] on April 27, 2012 - 7:55am

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CHICAGO – It’s getting harder and harder to satirize something as über-holy as the Vatican, given their preferred state of reality, but director Nanni Morretti gives it an absurd cinematic try just by highlighting the humanity behind the state of grace. Michel Piccoli portrays the title character in ‘We Have a Pope.’



Rating: **4.5/5.0**

This Italian film has caused a bit of pique from its storytelling source, and given the Vatican’s famous sensitivity to any form of commentary upon it, that’s not surprising. By telling the story of an elected pope, who refuses to complete the given assignment by appearing before his faithful, Moretti injects a natural emotional element to the often cold power play of papal politics. The pope presumably is infallible in decision making, but as long as there is a human being representing those decisions, the concept of infallibility is corruptible. Moretti illustrates this deftly in the film, without overtly criticizing the “holy” process.

Cardinal Melville (Michel Piccoli) gathers with his fellow cardinals to select a new pope, after the current one dies. The selection conclave is well scrutinized by the outside world, and the church anxiously awaits the decision. After a few split votes, the compromise candidate becomes Cardinal Melville. The announcement is given, but the ritual is not completed until the new pope appears on the Vatican balcony to bless the faithful. Cardinal Melville has a panic attack, and refuses to step into the role. So by church law, the cardinals must remain inside the Vatican until the new pontiff takes the reins.

The Vatican spokesman (Jerzy Stuhr) concocts a story that the new pope is deep in prayer, reflecting on his mission before he appears. In the meantime, the church hires a psychiatrist (Nanni Moretti) to analyze the situation. The doctor is perplexed by Melville, and he sends the pope-elect outside the gates to his wife (Margherita Buy). Melville escapes to the streets of Rome, where he becomes enamored by the day-to-day life, rather than his burden. This change of circumstance might just complete the proclamation, “we have a pope.”

“We Have a Pope” continues its limited release on April 27th in Chicago. Check local listings for theaters and showtimes. Featuring Michel Piccoli, Nanni Moretti, Jerzy Stuhr, Renato Scarpa and Margherita Buy. Screenplay by Nanni Moretti, Francesco Piccolo and Federtica Pontremoli. Directed by Nanni Moretti. Rated “R”

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Director Nanni Moretti (the Psychiatrist) Opposite Michel Piccoli (the Pope-Elect) in ‘We Have a Pope’
Photo credit: IFC Films

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