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## Of Men, Roles and Rules: Nanni Moretti's *Habemus Papam*

### Abstract

This paper focuses on Nanni Moretti's *Habemus Papam* and in particular on its representation of the interaction between religion and masculinity. In the light of gender studies, it asks which idea of masculinity, but also of fatherhood, Catholicism and its system of authority tend to encourage according to the film, and it assesses the opportunities for change that the film imaginatively explores. The analysis of the idea of masculinity investigates in particular the distinction between person and office, the necessity of which is dramatically illustrated in the film.

### Keywords

Catholicism, papacy, authority, masculinity, gender studies, Nanni Moretti, Theology and Film

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### Author Notes

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## Introduction

It is a matter of fact that Christianity, and in particular Catholicism, with its traditions, symbols and representative figures, has been a popular subject in films of almost all genres from the early days of cinema.<sup>1</sup> Among others, the figure of the Roman pontiff, so clearly expressive of Catholicism itself, has fascinated filmmakers since in 1898, William K.L. Dickson, a British inventor and cinematographer, was permitted to enter the Vatican and film several scenes of the old Leo XIII for the Biograph Company, one of which, that has survived until today, shows the pope blessing the camera while being filmed.<sup>2</sup> As Charles Musser relates, Dickson spent four months in Rome waiting for permission to shoot his film until his request, thanks to references from prominent prelates, was finally fulfilled.<sup>3</sup> Nanni Moretti, who is a Roman native living in Rome, was not so lucky, in spite of being probably the most influential contemporary Italian filmmaker. In 2010, his request to shoot scenes for a feature film inside the Sistine Chapel was rejected. He was compelled to recreate a meticulous facsimile of Michelangelo's chapel in order to realize his film *Habemus Papam* (*We Have a Pope*), a French/Italian comedy-drama that was awarded best film of the year 2011 by the critics from *Cahier du Cinéma*.<sup>4</sup>

From an ecclesiastical point of view, the refusal to film within the Vatican is *a posteriori* consistent, because in spite of appearances, *Habemus Papam* is not so

much a film about religion, but rather about the widespread crisis of authority in our societies, and therefore it is an eminently political film.<sup>5</sup> Despite this, however, or perhaps because of it, *Habemus Papam* offers a credible representation of certain aspects not only of Catholicism as an “apparatus,” but also of pervasive dynamics within Catholic tradition and culture, making use of an ironic, but never detached register of filmic language, as it is in fact profoundly involved with its object. For this reason it is possible to use this film, as I propose to do in this paper, in order to address a specific question related to religion, namely the question of which idea of masculinity Catholicism tends to encourage.

Behind this question lies the basic assumption of constructivist gender studies that masculinity and femininity, as social gender roles, reflect specific cultural beliefs and specific social and historical contexts.<sup>6</sup> It follows that in every epoch, religions as cultural expressions and the churches as social institutions provide the resources for the establishment of a certain idea of masculinity and femininity. Concerning monotheistic religions such as Christianity, and specifically Catholicism, it is easy to observe how far they have gone (and how successful they have been) in closely associating masculinity with authority, not only as a consequence of the conception of God as father, but also of a well-defined ecclesial structure that advocates the need for a gender hierarchy. Ronald Neal calls this specific institutionalized expression of masculinity “Abrahamic masculinity.”<sup>7</sup> In this perspective, men are made to rule and take on positions of

authority, while women are made to be submissive. But interestingly, “religion” or even “Christianity” are not stable categories, not any more than “masculinity” and “femininity,”<sup>8</sup> and if the concrete interactions between them frequently confirm the role of religious ideologies in legitimating gender inequalities, they can also provide opportunities for a critical reconsideration of gender as socially and historically constructed, and possibly offer the space for the development of more equal and just gender relations.

However, these interactions need to be examined in a given context. The one identified by *Habemus Papam* is that of contemporary Catholicism at its institutional source, the Vatican, and of a group of its male representatives who are more or less aware of the radical dechristianization of the modern world, but are still nourished by the conviction of the historical role of the Catholic Church in public life, and proud of its traditions and heritage. After a brief presentation of the film’s narrative, coupled with a discussion of certain of its main elements, I will focus my analysis on the film’s characters’ attitudes and motivations. Subsequently, I will discuss from a theological point of view the way in which, according to *Habemus Papam*, masculinity is distortedly reflected in the mirror of Catholicism, and I will conclude with some remarks on how the film encourages viewers to critically engage with this mirror image.

### **We have a pope: A great joy?**

*Habemus Papam* is the twelfth feature film directed by Nanni Moretti, a filmmaker and actor well-known not only in Italy but also in France – where he has been president of the jury in Cannes in 2011, and won a Palm d’Or ten years earlier for his drama *La stanza del figlio* (*The Son’s Room*, 2001) – and in the United States, where he is especially appreciated for his comedies and is sometimes referred to as the “Italian Woody Allen” because of his ironical style used in movies that frequently include autobiographical traits.<sup>9</sup> His cinema, which blurs the boundary between comedy and drama, never lacks internal coherence and ethical commitment.<sup>10</sup> Not a Catholic himself, Moretti is an accurate observer of the role and difficulties of Catholicism in a changing social reality. In his *La messa è finita* (*The Mass is Ended*, 1985), he recounts the failure and bitterness of Don Giulio, a young Catholic priest rather rigorous in his pastoral duties, who is assigned to a parish in Rome and here confronted with a secularized milieu. Already in this film, the city of Rome as a symbol of the center attracting its surroundings, as the embodiment of an ancestral power, as the suffocating maternal womb (already depicted as such by Fellini and Pasolini), plays a central role in connection with the issue of the crisis of authority – “or perhaps the superfluity of authority,” as Ewa Mazierska and Laura Rascaroli suggest.<sup>11</sup> But one should also note that in Moretti’s view, this crisis does not regard just the

religious sphere, but involves the social, cultural and political dimensions of our life, as seen especially in *Bianca* (id., 1984) and *Palombella rossa* (*Red Lob*, 1989).

*Habemus Papam* begins with the solemn celebration of the funeral of an unspecified pope, for which TV images from the real funeral of John Paul II were used. Then we see a procession of chanting cardinals file into the Sistine Chapel to elect a new pontiff. These initial scenes, which show the public face of the Church in all its pomp, convey a certain gravity that contrasts with what follows. Once the cardinals are enclosed in the Sistine Chapel and the voting begins, they lose a great part of their solemnity and appear uncertain about how to exercise their responsibility. They scribble and scratch out names on the ballot papers, each of them reciting the same prayer, secretly, in their different languages: “Not me, my Lord!”, “Not me, I pray thee...” The crisis of authority here clearly leads to the fear of having to assume it with all this implies.

The votes swing until the final ballot, when the humble Cardinal Melville is elected out of the blue. The cardinals seem delighted, while Melville smiles nervously. He appears confused, but accepts the election. Yet when the new pope is dressed in his new white vestments with red cape and is led to the balcony overlooking St. Peter’s Square in order to be announced as the new pope, something unpredictable happens; paralyzed by fear, Melville is incapable to present himself to the crowd of the faithful waiting to know his name and see his

face, thereby to publically assume the charge for which he has been elected. After having repeated thrice “I cannot!” until turning these words into a liberating scream, he leaves the astonished cardinals and takes refuge in the inner rooms of the Apostolic Palace. But Melville’s scream “I cannot!” comes too late for the strict Roman ritual; Melville is actually already pope and he cannot afford not to take office. He should have answered, when first asked whether he accepted his election, like the scrivener Bartleby, created by Herman Melville, from which the cardinal takes his name, did: “I would prefer not to.”<sup>12</sup> As noted by Gilles Deleuze, Bartleby’s formula is not just a negation, but rather a way to limit himself to a pure potentiality which never will be turned into action, neither positive nor negative. Such a formula “creates a zone of indeterminacy that makes the words indistinguishable, which empties the language.”<sup>13</sup> The way in which Cardinal Melville accepts his election in the film, but immediately afterwards declares not to be able to bear it, creates an analogous blank, in language as well as in ritual.

The title of Moretti’s film refers to the solemn Latin declaration of the election of a new pope by the senior cardinal deacon: “*Annuntio vobis gaudium magnum: Habemus Papam*” (I announce to you a great joy: We have a pope), which is normally followed by the announcement of the name of the pope. In the film, the public announcement is interrupted before the identity of the elected pope is revealed, so that the joyful statement that the Church, under the assistance



of the Holy Spirit, has found a new guide and supreme pastor, remains indefinitely suspended and turns into a dreadful emptiness, an emptiness that the ritual mercilessly evidences. Yes, we have a pope; but he would prefer not to. And this is not a great joy.

From this starting point the film combines two narratives. The first and more serious, if not even tragic one, centers on the persistent refusal of the designated pope to assume his office. Melville, played by the respected French actor Michel Piccoli, is anguished by his election, which nevertheless he recognizes as God's will. He feels tired and wants to be alone. Brezzi, an eminent psychoanalyst (played by Moretti himself) urgently called to his rescue, only has time for a brief, almost negligible exchange with him, because as soon as Melville has the opportunity, he leaves the Vatican incognito and covers his traces, leaving the Church without a guide and the psychoanalyst without his distinguished patient ("It would have been a case so highly interesting for me!" he says, dismayed). This vacancy of the central position of power in the Church doubtless represents one of the major themes of the film, well symbolized by the image of the empty balcony to which the faithful direct their gaze, waiting for an epiphany that could release their anguish.

The second narrative, more cheerful if not comic, concerns the cardinals gathered in the Vatican, waiting for a solution to the unexpected situation, certain that Melville, once he has set aside his scruples and modesty, will take over the

role for which they have chosen him. While they wait for the happy ending, they do not appear really concerned about the drama the new pope faces nor about the anxious expectation of the faithful. It is as if they had fulfilled their function in electing the pope and were now free to go back to their private occupations, which are depicted, in most cases, as the typical occupations of elderly people.

At the end of the film, Melville returns to the Vatican and states publicly that he is not able to bear the role entrusted to him and that he abandons it: “I feel to be among those who cannot lead, but who must be led.” With these words, which bring the cardinals to tears and leave the believers heart-broken, the film closes on a somber note, atypical for a comedy. Nevertheless, in their sincerity, these words also express the wish for new opportunities for the Church, in the sense that it may be able to accept human weakness and to recognize the complexity of the management and representation of authority. This conclusion appears as the involuntary prediction of the resignation of Pope Benedict XVI, which startled the Catholic Church in February 2013, a courageous and charismatic gesture, which embodies the hopes for a renewal of the Church. Even in the Catholic Church, sometimes reality exceeds fiction.<sup>14</sup>

### **How to play one's part: the characters' dilemma**

I will now turn to my main question – masculinity and religion in their interrelation –, and it will soon become evident that in a Catholic context, this pair must necessarily make room for a third term, namely fatherhood. It is clear that Moretti is not directly interested in the question of masculinity in Catholicism, but rather in the public dimension of the Catholic Church and in its governmental procedures. In fact, as noted above, his target is precisely the exercise of authority and its failures. However, since governmental procedures in the Catholic Church are controlled and exercised by men, masculinity emerges as a central element of the narrative, even independently from the author's intention.

*Habemus Papam* can be seen as a film about a group of men who happen to be cardinals of the Catholic Church, and among whom one is chosen to be the new pope. Let us first look at the cardinals. They are portrayed sensitively and without any prejudice. Moretti is interested in the men hiding behind their public image of princes of the Church, staid and wise as they appear at the beginning of the film. Although elderly men, they are represented as somewhat child-like. Once they fulfilled the “practice” of the papal election, for example, the small group of cardinals from Oceania wants to run out into the streets of Rome, like tourists, or rather like schoolboys on holidays, and they seem upset when informed that they cannot leave the Vatican until the new pope has been

publically announced. The film emphasizes the human fragility and fads of these old men, who become nervous when losing in a card game, need pills to sleep, have bad dreams and do not seem to have any idea of the real needs of their Church. When Melville confesses to be one of those who must be led, they all seem to belong to the same category, as they had shown during a volleyball tournament organized to occupy their time in the Vatican. Involved in it without any real interests in sports and despite their lack of athletic skills, they are ready to enter into the competition and end up captivated by the game, without any fear of ridicule. In the final analysis, what really counts for them seems to be that the rules are well-defined, no matter if these rules define the procedures of the consistory or a volleyball match.

The protagonist, Melville, is also depicted as a frail old person, unassuming and confused. However, his attitude is not comic, but rather tragic. He exudes sorrow, but also dignity. Despite his inconsistency, he seems to have a lucidity that the other cardinals lack in their incapacity to assume their responsibility to guide the Church in a context that is vexed with new challenges and to respond to the expectations of Catholics around the world. In one scene we see Melville practicing a speech aloud in a public bus, trying to express, first of all to himself, what the Church really needs. He murmurs: “Recently, it has been hard for the Church to understand things.”

Shuffling along the streets of Rome, he gives the impression to have lost his direction in life, even if he is sure to have no problem with his faith. When questioned about his job, he pretends that he is an actor. It's not quite a lie, since as a young man he wanted to be an actor (as the young Karol Woitiła did), but failed the audition for drama school. His wanderings take him to a hotel where he runs into a group of actors. As he watches them rehearse *The Seagull* by Anton Chekhov, for a moment he recaptures his youthful passion, recalling lines from the play, one main theme of which is precisely the disillusionment and regret of those who, like Nina or Maša, would have preferred to lead another life.

The reference to Chekhov's drama in *Habemus Papam* also suggests that now Melville has been forced into another role, one that demands an actor's skill on a much bigger platform. It is the film's most resonant, somewhat Shakespearean metaphor: that the whole world, and especially the Church with its elaborate pomp and rituals, is a stage on which people act a part they have not entirely chosen themselves. The curious sequence toward the end of the film where the cardinals and all the Vatican staff enter a theatre where *The Seagull* is going to be performed, finding Melville among the audience, is very significant in this regard: the realm of the theatre and that of the Church literally fuse into one another. Precisely this fusion, or confusion, seems to allow the pope to accept his role, at least for the time needed to announce his retirement from the ecclesiastical scene. This correlation between Church and theatre is also significant with respect

to the issue of gender. Like in ancient theater, in the Catholic Church today, only men can be “actors,” while women can only aspire to be extras. In the Church, men are the players of a game, or the actors of a play. They know the rules, they know the part to act.

Of course a new kind of problem arises when in the Church the part assigned to a given individual (a male, it goes without saying) comes to take over others, because of its overwhelming importance and of a power not sufficiently compensated by other powers in the hierarchical system. The modern understanding of the Roman pontiff’s authority, which has developed mostly on the basis of the Roman conceptions of law and *potestas* (power) and has encouraged the legal and political centralization of the ecclesiastical government, can legitimately be seen as the result of such an unbalanced situation, and it is actually seen this way even by Catholic theologians who cannot be suspected of anti-Roman sentiments.<sup>15</sup> How is it still possible to carry on playing one’s part when one’s role is so exposed, or when one has the impression to be the only actor on the stage? Maybe Moretti wants his audience to ask similar questions when he shows an actor of the Chekhovian troupe seized with a fit of madness and embodying all the characters of the drama, without being able to wait for replies from the others. When no dialogue is possible, when dialectics are structurally impeded, then authority becomes a useless luxury, or a mere foolishness.

Up to this point, our analysis of the film's characters has focused exclusively on the cardinal electors and the elected cardinal. If now we turn our attention to other characters new important elements will be added to our discussion about Catholicism and masculinity. In spite of its ecclesiastical setting, in fact, *Habemus Papam* does not provide exclusively clerical models of masculinity, but also secular ones. Let us take the Church's spokesman Raijski and the psychoanalyst Brezzi. Raijski, played by a delightful Jerzy Stuhr, is the most active figure in the film, and also the most comic one. While the others seem all blocked in an impasse, he tries to efficiently fulfill his functions, appearing most of the time nervous and breathless. Not only does he act as the Vatican press secretary, but he also insistently tries to convince the pope to accept his charge, steers the disoriented cardinals like a school teacher and takes control of the critical situation. Although he dedicates himself to mediate between public expectation and the weaknesses of the ecclesiastic system and its representatives, in the end the impasse is as impossible to resolve for him as for any other, in spite of his activism. Even if he does not find a solution other than the creation of the illusion of a Church firmly ruled by its head – and for this purpose he lies to the cardinals as much as to the journalists – he is not a negative character, nor does he represent a negative form of masculinity. No doubt his attitude is ambiguous and paternalistic, but he does not shy away from his duties, and he is ready to recognize his responsibility and challenges others to do the same.

Brezzi, the psychoanalyst, is a complex and idiosyncratic character, as the characters played by Moretti in his own films usually are. In spite of his secular background (he is an atheist and embraces a strongly Darwinian world view), he easily finds his place in the male fellowship of the Vatican palaces, where he is confined with the cardinals, and where everyone has a recognizable role. Maybe it is precisely this context that drives him to uphold the model of masculine dominance by repeatedly affirming that he is the best in his field and that his wife, the second-best psychotherapist in Rome, left him out of jealousy.

What ought to be stressed here is that all of the film's characters identified by their role are confronted with an impasse that makes it impossible for them to truly act their role. Raijski has to explain to the media and to the believers why the pope who just was elected refuses to assume his office publically, without of course revealing the Pope's real anxieties. Brezzi has to analyze the pope without talking about sex, his mother, infancy, and dreams, because analyzing a pope is of course not the same as analyzing any other person. In a way, their struggle is similar to that of the Chekhovian actor mentioned above. This latter, in spite of his talent, is incapable of limiting himself to the role assigned, while Brezzi and Raijski impersonate their part so perfectly that they cannot take a distance from it, even when it cannot be performed any more. In all three cases the result is an impasse. The Swiss Guard responsible for replacing the pope in his apartments<sup>16</sup> represents the opposite extreme of their attitude. For him, the role to assume has



no real importance and does not involve his person at all: it is just a question of mechanically acting and dressing as required, and the result is guaranteed with minimal effort. It seems as if there was no intermediary solution between a complete overlapping of person and role, and the complete disjunction of them. In the film all male characters struggle with the relationship between role and person, from the pope to the television reporters who clumsily try to discover whether the smoke rising from the Sistine Chapel is white or black: their incertitude betrays their unfamiliarity with Catholic rituals and traditions that does not fit with their assignment as Vatican journalists. But what about the female characters?

In fact they have very little importance in the film, with the only notable exception being the female psychoanalyst, Brezzi's ex-wife, interpreted by Margherita Buy. She plays a secondary but by no means irrelevant role, as her function is to emphasize some aspects of the male characters, in particular the pope and the pope's psychoanalyst. However, what the female characters, as irrelevant as they seem to be on the level of the narrative development, suggest is that the accomplishment of one's role is not all that makes a person. Let us take the psychoanalyst just mentioned. She is certainly as deeply involved in her profession as her ex-husband, but she appears to be concerned with other aspects of life, too. She is occupied with her children, spends time with a friend facing conjugal difficulties, and is seen taking the first steps in a new relationship. She

also finds time to listen to Melville's needs outside a strictly professional context. Other women just marginally appearing in the film do the same for him: a saleswoman offers him a glass of water and asks him to come along with her after work, a girl in a coffee bar lends him her cell phone. In their eyes, he is not the pope, not even a man of any importance because of his position, but just a person needing help. While the male characters, with their roles and positions, constantly expect something from Melville (Raijski, in his impatience, never misses an opportunity to remind him, with all due respect, what he is expected to do in obedience to God's will), these female characters allow him to be himself in their presence, which encourages him to develop an understanding of his own personal situation and dilemmas, and, ultimately, to take the dramatic decision to renounce the papacy.

### **Man at his best: The Holy Father as ideal father**

The confrontation between male and female characters and their respective attitudes reinforces the idea that men, when wholly identifying themselves with their roles, end up trapped in double-bind situations. Brezzi and Raijski, as already noted, have to perform certain tasks but are, so to say, structurally unable to succeed in doing so. But the cardinals, too, and above all the pope, are not exempt from this problem. On the contrary, their double-bind is precisely related

to the way they understand their mission and to what they are expected to do in order to accomplish it. To be a pope, one must be humble before God, but one must also be able to shed all humbleness in order to fulfill the role of God's representative on earth. One must be old enough to be considered wise, but one must have the energy and the audacity of a young man to realize the changes that are required. And on another level, which the film does not touch explicitly, as a pope, one must be the father of all Catholics, but one must also be a perfectly chaste person. So the conclusion seems to be that any role, but the role of the pope first of all, as it is shown in the film, represents a sort of double-bind for men and appears to be unrealizable given its symbolical charge and the expectations it nourishes.

In this respect it is interesting to recall what Julia Kristeva said concerning the myth of the ideal father. Catholic faith, she says, rests upon an indelible trust in the existence of an ideal father, and upon absolute love for this loving father. In its disregard for the Oedipus myth, Christian faith leads towards the strong idealization of a totally diserotized father, who is virgin and, despite this, fully in possession and expressive of his generative power, a father who makes the Law, but also gives his perfect Love.<sup>17</sup> The warning of psychoanalysis about this idealized fatherhood reminds one of the unavoidability of the castration complex: no father (not even God) and no paternal Law can ever be the ultimate guarantee

of their offspring. That is why, as Lacan recalls, the tombs of Moses and Christ, the great legislators, are both empty.<sup>18</sup>

The historical and symbolical figure of the Holy Father, the Roman pontiff, seems to evoke this mythical figure of the ideal father in a unique way, up to the point of sometimes being confused with the Christian God although he has so little in common with the God of the Bible. If this association between the Holy Father of the Catholic tradition and the ideal father of psychoanalysis is not totally deceptive, we can interpret the panic of Melville in Moretti's film as a moment of perspicuity rather than as a moment of weakness. He prefers to give up because he perceives the unfeasibility of what is expected of him. The vacancy of the power position, which corresponds to his flight through Rome, underlined by the symbolic and recurrent image of the empty balcony overlooking St. Peter's, recalls the impossible overlapping of the role and the man, an impossibility that an untalented actor like Melville easily recognizes.

### **Conclusion: Persons, offices and masculinity**

If *La messa è finita* succeeded in breaking with the strong Italian cinematic tradition of depicting priests as lovable caricatures,<sup>19</sup> *Habemus Papam* offers a portrayal of a pope who fails to embody the power of his sacred office. In both these films, Moretti refuses the standardized, harmonious representation of male

Church representatives, and searches for more complexity. The main characters in these two films, Don Giulio and Cardinal Melville, communicate a sense of suffering and isolation resulting from what they are expected to be – and sincerely want to be. Their suffering, to which both of them cannot find a solution other than escape, comes from the relentless pressure of a duty that tends to overlay their whole person starting precisely with their male identity. At the end of the failed attempt at having a clinical conversation, Brezzi asks Melville: “But do you want to be pope?” Melville’s answer – “I already am pope” – leaves eloquently out of consideration his personal will. In fact, it would not be possible for him to give another answer, because the absolute identification of (male) person and office leaves no room for the expression of any personal desire unrelated to one’s duty, even a perfectly licit one, as, in the case of Melville himself, the love for theater and acting. The impossibility to coordinate duty with desire, or rather that desire is overtaken by duty, is precisely what exposes a person to double-binding processes, or, in psychoanalytic terms, to a rupture of the symbolic order. As already noted, men in the institution of the Church are actors in a play who perfectly know the rules and the part to act. But this part tends to completely identify them with their masculinity, as recommended by the theology of ordained ministry established by the Gregorian Reformation in the cultural climate of feudal and patriarchal sacralism. Far from guaranteeing the realization of duty, the perfect superposition of person and ecclesiastic office tends to create what David

Rohrer calls a “pastoral persona,” i.e., ultimately a pretender.<sup>20</sup> According to the ideology of the pastoral persona, the male individual with his inner motivations has to disappear behind the objectives of his ministry. He has to obey what he considers to be the Lord’s will. But under these conditions, it is not surprising that one might desire to actually disappear in order to escape this superhuman task. When Melville is at last cornered by Raijski and his appeals to divine will, he replies with these dramatic words: “Cannot we make me vanish? I disappear and all this never happened. No one has ever seen me, no one will ever see me again.” The price to pay for not being a pretender is indeed high.

*Habemus Papam* is a film with almost exclusively male characters who strongly identify with their role, which is, for most of them, an ecclesiastic role of high responsibility. Interestingly, among the few women the film shows, inside the Vatican palaces or in St. Peter’s Square, there are a lot of nuns. They are also immediately identifiable in reference to their role by the viewer, but their role is acknowledged as marginal, and consequently left out of the narrative. This seems to be a conscious choice by Moretti, an attempt to represent the dysfunctionality of authority in the Catholic Church as a particularly eloquent instance of a more general crisis of authority. One could infer that, due to the marginality of their role, women in the Catholic Church are better preserved from the risk of identifying completely with their office,<sup>21</sup> while men, like Cardinal Melville and the others, pay for their privileges by struggling with the demands of their role

(the *performance* of their role: the word is meaningful),<sup>22</sup> which exposes them to “no-exit” situations. The capability to recognize these double-binds and to refuse to be caught in them – as Melville does – could be read as an opportunity to become conscious of the need for more freedom and more sincerity in religious institutions, which necessarily goes hand in hand with a reconsideration of the gender inequalities they give rise to and legitimize.

<sup>1</sup> It has also been noted that in the last decades, the interest of cinema (and television) focused predominantly on the Catholic Church as an institution, not on Catholicism as a religious community. See Frank Damour, “L’Église catholique au miroir des fictions contemporaines”, *Études* 155, 7-8 (2011), 65-74.

<sup>2</sup> Already in 1896 Vittorio Calcina, an Italian representative of the Lumière Company, had the opportunity to film, for the very first time, a short scene about Pope Leo XII. See *Cento anni di Biennale e di cinema: la presenza della Chiesa*, ed. Andrea Piersanti (Roma: Ente dello spettacolo, 1996), 55.

<sup>3</sup> See Charles Musser, *The Emergence of Cinema: The American Screen to 1907* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990), 219-220.

<sup>4</sup> See “Les top ten 2011”, *Cahiers du Cinéma* 673 (December 2011).

<sup>5</sup> According to the political philosopher Alessandro Ferrara, for example, the film shows “le fondement religieux de la culture berlusconienne des apparences” (“the religious foundation of Berlusconi’s culture of appearances”). “L’hégémonie catholique et la vie publique en Italie”, *Cités* 49, 1 (2012), 176.

<sup>6</sup> See *The Social Construction of Gender*, eds. Judith Lorber and Susan A. Farrell (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1991).

<sup>7</sup> See Ronald Neal, “Engaging Abrahamic Masculinity: Race, Religion and the Measure of Manhood”, *CrossCurrents* 61, 4 (2011), 557-564.

<sup>8</sup> See Björn Krondorfer, “Editorial”, *CrossCurrents* 61, 4 (2011), 426.

<sup>9</sup> Bert Cardullo, who stresses the limits of such a reference, rightly remarks that “the central position of psychoanalysis in Allen’s life and films is replaced, in Moretti’s, with politics.” *In Search of Cinema: Writings on International Film Art* (Montreal: McGill-Queen’s University Press, 2004), 240.

<sup>10</sup> In tune with postmodern aesthetics, his films “constitute eloquent examples of a reconciliation between acute socio-political criticism, and the aesthetic of irony, pastiche, and meta-cinematic playfulness.” Rosa Barotsi and Pierpaolo Antonello, “The Personal and The Political: The Cinema of Nanni Moretti”, in *Postmodern Impegno. Ethics and Commitment in Contemporary Italian Culture*, eds. Pierpaolo Antonello and Florian Mussgnug (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009), 190.

<sup>11</sup> Ewa Mazierska and Laura Rascaroli, *The Cinema of Nanni Moretti: Dreams and Diaries* (London: Wallflower Press, 2004), 41.

<sup>12</sup> See Herman Melville, *Bartleby the Scrivener: A Story of Wall Street*, first published in 1853.

<sup>13</sup> “*creuse une zone d’indétermination qui fait que les mots ne se distinguent plus, elle fait le vide dans le langage.*” Gilles Deleuze, “Bartleby ou la formule”, in *Critique et clinique* (Paris: Éditions de Minuit, 1993), 95.

<sup>14</sup> The correlation of the filmic fiction with the current vicissitudes of the papacy is in fact twofold. In the film, Melville resigns, as Joseph Ratzinger would do later in reality; but differently from Melville, the “real” new pope, Josè Mario Bergoglio, did not seem frightened to have been chosen. He greeted the masses gathered in St. Peter’s Square smiling and with a gentle “Good evening!” The simplicity of considering himself above all a believer (and the Bishop of Rome) seems to have helped him in assuming his responsibilities. But does not such a simplicity, so beneficial for the Church in its spontaneous manifestation, risk, in the long term, to harm the meaning and functionality of authority? The issue of authority always requires a delicate balance.

<sup>15</sup> Walter Kasper, for example, stresses the critical passage “*von der auctoritas zur potestas, von der traditio zur discretio, von der communicatio fidei zur determinatio fidei*” (“from authority to power, from tradition to discretion, from the communication of faith to the determination of faith”) and its serious consequences for the whole Church. “*Freiheit des Evangeliums und dogmatische Bindung in der katholischen Theologie. Grundlagenüberlegungen zur Unfehlbarkeitsdebatte*”, in *Die Theologie und das Lehramt*, ed. W. Kern (Herder: Freiburg im Breisgau, 1982), 208.

<sup>16</sup> Here we can observe another involuntary correlation between film and reality: Moretti imagines the papal apartments uninhabited because of Melville’s disappearance. But in fact, the papal apartments *are* uninhabited since Pope Francis decided to take residence outside the Vatican palaces, in the Casa Santa Marta guesthouse.

<sup>17</sup> See Julia Kristeva, *Thérèse mon amour* (Paris: Fayard, 2008), 207-212.

<sup>18</sup> Jacques Lacan, “Metaphor of the subject”, in *Écrits. The First Complete Edition in English*, trans. Bruce Fink (New York/London: W. W. Norton, 2006), 350.

<sup>19</sup> Just think of the famous series of Don Camillo films, released between 1952 and 1965, and much appreciated by the Vatican, as Daniela Treviri Gennari suspects, not only for promoting Catholic values among Italian communists, but also and above all for their representation of a traditional family setting based on patriarchal masculinity. See Daniela Treviri Gennari, *Post-war Italian Cinema: American Intervention, Vatican Interests* (New York: Routledge, 2009), 141.



<sup>20</sup> “There is freedom in being awakened from the fictional world of the pastoral persona and delivered into the real world of a real person who happens to hold a pastoral office.” David Rohrer, *The Sacred Wilderness of Pastoral Ministry* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2012), 73.

<sup>21</sup> Or, better said: insofar as, in line with the ideal equivalence of person and function, Catholic female religious life tends to remove individuality (individuality of gender included), it has also the opportunity to diminish the implications of gender identity. The fact to be no more seen as women, which in itself is deplorable, has its advantages when women are excluded from various spheres of life *per* their gender. Catholic Church history offers many examples when “Vowed women embraced gender constraints and turned them to their advantage.” Sioban Nelson, *Say Little, Do Much: Nursing, Nuns and Hospitals in the Nineteenth Century* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 13.

<sup>22</sup> Significantly the American Catholic ecclesiologist Richard P. McBrien, in his work *Ministry: A Theological, Pastoral Handbook* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1987), states that “we have the right and the duty to demand, within reason, the highest standards of ministerial performance” on the part of the Church’s ministers. Quoted in Thomas F. O’Meara, *Theology of Ministry*, rev. ed. (Mahwah, NJ: Paulist Press, 1999), 238.

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