

# POPREBEL

## **The Curse of/on the Clergy: Backlash Against the Catholic Church in Poland post-2015**

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# CATHOLIC CHURCH AND POPULIST POWER IN POLAND

- ❖ The Catholic Church as central to the establishing, structuring and legitimising of populist discourse in Poland
- ❖ The Church as guardian of (neo-)traditionalist values:
  - ❖ The only and universal **truth** (as opposed to post-modern relativity)
  - ❖ Tradition and ontological **security** (as opposed to fluidity)
  - ❖ **Patriarchal order** (as opposed to constructed identities)
  - ❖ **Homogenous community** (as opposed to diverse society)
  - ❖ Glorification of **sacrifice** and **victimhood**
  - ❖ Unbreakable **bond** between the notion of **Polishness and Catholicism** (as opposed to secularism and cosmopolitanism)
- ❖ The Church's main mission is to translate values into norms and to remain the most relevant frame of reference for the moral and social order
- ❖ The Church as ideal legitimising institution for populists in government, because it is perceived as timeless, apolitical, trustworthy and placed above the political sphere (while in fact it is a political actor)

# “ONLY UNDER THE CROSS, UNDER THIS SIGN ONLY, A POLE WILL BE A POLE AND POLAND WILL BE POLAND”

Symbolic images of Catholic Church in Poland

- Catholic Church as a guardian-shepherd
- Catholic Church as a protector of Polishness
- Catholic Church as the power aspiring to monopolise the normative order
- Catholic Church as a political player

**How are these images transmitted and contested by culture?**

Theatre play “The Curse” (2017) directed by Oliver Frljić

Movie “Clergy” (2018) directed by Wojtek Smarzowski

Documentary “Tylko nie mów nikomu” [“Tell No One”] (2019) directed by Tomasz Sekielski

Theatre play “Hamlet” (2019) directed by Bartosz Szydlowski

How are these works inscribed in the political context? What is the debate on Catholic Church in times of populism ?

# "THE CURSE"

Oliver Frljić: "Testing of what is allowed in art is my duty"

The play questions the monopoly of the Church to set boundaries and tests the limits of artistic expression -> challenging the role of art and of the artist -> challenging of the sacred



# “HAMLET”

The play shows the clergy as a collective political actor (Polonius as Archbishop Jędraszewski).

The world is a stage, the stage is the world.

“Hamlet is ending, this is reality. The dream is over”



# “CLERGY”

“The Church is holy, but the people in the Church are sinners.”

Allegory of the sins of the Church and abuses of power.

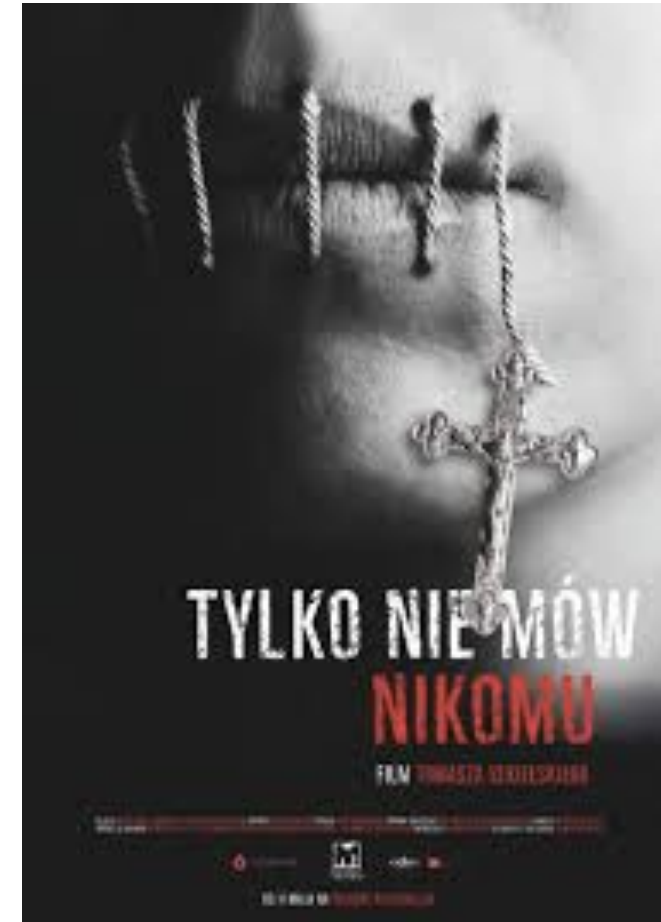
Clergy as a monolithic class vs individual agency of priests



# “TELL NO ONE”

Universal truth of the Church and mythical image of the clergy (symbolic reality) vs individual and experienced realities of abuse

Who has the right to be a victim?



Gazeta Polska  
“Clergy is our  
treasure in the fight  
with Nazism,  
communism, LGBT and  
Islamists”

Jarosław Kaczyński:  
“who raises their  
hand on the Church,  
who wants to destroy  
it, raises their hand  
on Poland”



Mariusz Max Kolonko, Youtuber: “an offensive of “cultural Marxism””

Jan Dziedziczak, PiS:  
“you think that the Jewish star needs to be protected, while the cross can be spit upon”



Paweł Lisicki, Do Rzeczy: “I would like to see how these outstanding artists offend other feelings, because so far, their breaking of taboo is only targeted at Catholics”

Maciej Świrski, Reduta Dobrego Imienia: “such art contributes to the deconstruction and destruction of the basics of European civilisation”



# CONCLUSIONS

- Cultural expression challenges the symbolic images of the Catholic Church.
- Challenging Catholic Church means that the foundations of populist discourse (absolute truth, set norms, unchangeable values, homogenous community, collectivist trust in traditional institutions and leaders etc.) are questioned.
- Anxiety of the populists in power and creation of counter-discourses (Church and nation as victims, new ideological enemies: e.g. LGBT minorities, generalised elites, various Others).

