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A Church-State Conflict

Jerzy Kawalerowicz's MOTHER JOAN OF THE ANGELS *and Cinematic Projections of Catholicism in Władysław Gomułka's Poland*

> "There is something, which exists outside of our senses, something, which cannot be explained. Perhaps this thing is God. Only faith gives answers to such questions, but only to those who seek it. I do not possess this faith or the thirst for it. I do not dwell on the issue of whether God exists."[1)]
>
> Jerzy Kawalerowicz (1922–2007)

Released in 1961, Jerzy Kawalerowicz's film MATKA JOANNA OD ANIOŁÓW (Mother Joan of the Angels, 1961) remains a classic of art cinema. Set in 17th century Poland, the movie is based on Jarosław Iwaszkiewicz's novella, which took inspiration from the 1634 case regarding the possession of French nuns in Loudun. Rather than reconstructing specific historical events and the oppressive climate of the Counter-Reformation, Kawalerowicz and his script writer, Tadeusz Konwicki, aimed to express opposition to "the external restrictions placed on man whether these are Catholic or not."[2)]

Intriguing and Aesopian, the film was largely perceived as concerned with contemporary issues and references. It could hardly be viewed otherwise, especially given the context of the Church-State conflict, the battle over the symbolic millennial anniversary of Polish statehood and Christianity, which consumed much of Władysław Gomułka's fourteen year rule. For Church leaders, Kawalerowicz's movie constituted an atheistic attack on cloistered communities. For communist leaders and non-believers, the film unmasked obscurantist myths and religious oppression as well as pathologies resulting from repressed sexuality behind convent walls.

In this article, I argue that both sides misunderstood Kawalerowicz's work and instrumentalized it in their duel between confessional and secular identities, a duel over the

1) Krzysztof Kornacki, *Kino polskie wobec katolicyzmu 1955–1970* (Gdańsk: słowo/obraz terytoria, 2004), p. 254.

2) Paul Coates, *The Red and the White: The Cinema of People's Poland* (London and New York: Wallflower Press, 2005), p. 187.

ownership of Polish national identity. The affair illustrated the growing tensions between the Catholic hierarchy and the party establishment. It also pointed to dilemmas experienced by members of the Polish artistic intelligentsia during the time of this conflict between religious and political elites. Last but not least, MOTHER JOAN OF THE ANGELS adds to our understanding of the uneasy relationship between filmmakers associated with the Polish School and religion.

Transcripts of meetings of Komisje Ocen Scenariuszy (the Script Assessment Commissions) and Komisje Kolaudacyjne (the Commissions of Film Approval) attest that high-ranking officials paid close attention to film industry and cinematic projections of religiosity. Both of these part-government, part-industry commissions were headed by the chairman of Naczelny Zarząd Kinematografii (the Chief Board of Cinematography) and populated by representatives of zespoły filmowe (film production units), party officials in charge of culture and propaganda, censors, and the directors and scriptwriters of assessed films. Their verdict mandated the admission of movies for production and distribution. It is important to keep this process in mind. All movies discussed in this article reflected the personal choices as well as the artistic and socio-political perspectives of their filmmakers. In other words, these films were not made on the demand of the government. One can argue that party bigwigs showed more concern about potential accusations of anti-clericalism than the filmmakers, who, not surprisingly, fought for the completion of their projects, while also trying to stay faithful to their artistic vision. In this respect, the long assessment debate on Kazimierz Kutz's MILCZENIE (Silence, 1963) offers an invaluable account of the polyphonic realm shared by the ruling regime and Polish cinema.

A few words are needed about film production culture in Poland. Although state-owned, the Polish film industry became relatively de-centralized in 1955 with the creation of film production units. Part-artistic, part-economic enterprises, film units included directors, writers, literary critics, and production managers. Similar institutions existed, in one or another form, in socialist Czechoslovakia and Hungary.[3] We should keep in mind that cinema in the Soviet bloc was not a mere extension of party ideology and propaganda. With the exception of the period of Socialist Realism, the relationship between the party state and filmmakers was determined by the regimes' policies toward the intelligentsia and oscillated between official dictation, mutual accommodation, and artistic autonomy. At times, cinematographers were even able to capitalize on the vicissitudes of party politics. The case of MOTHER JOAN OF THE ANGELS provides a good illustration of this point.

From Détente to the Millennium Battle: An Overview of Church-State Relations in Gomułka's Poland

The end of Stalinism in Poland and Władysław Gomułka's return to power in October 1956 marked a crucial paradigm shift in the history of Polish communism, namely the

3) On film production units see Marcin Adamczak, Piotr Marecki, Marcin Malatyński (eds), *Film Units: Restart* (Kraków-Łódź: Korporacja Halart, 2012).

adoption of a specifically Polish road to socialism that blended Marxism and nationalism. The post-Stalinist People's Poland was a socialist state, but — above all — it was presented as the end result of historical processes that promoted the Polish nation state. For the Communist Party, the growing reliance on ethnocentric nationalism resulted in a transformation into a nationalist-populist regime, which reached its climax during the 1967–68 anti-Semitic campaign. The initial reforms implemented in 1956 were ground-breaking. The heavy sentences meted out to a few notorious Stalinist henchmen "solved" the problem of punishing those truly responsible for the Stalinist terror. The party also sought to consolidate its popularity by stressing its patriotic credentials in the struggle against the Nazi occupiers and rehabilitating former Home Army soldiers. By halting collectivization, Gomułka partly succeeded in bridging the gap between the regime and the peasant masses. Cuts in military spending, new housing projects, and moderate pay increases improved living standards. By abandoning the doctrine of Socialist Realism and lifting the requirements of ideological orthodoxy in the spheres of culture and science, Gomułka won the compliance of numerous intellectuals and artists. This cultural relaxation went hand in hand with the advent of the Polish School, a generation of filmmakers who raised Polish cinema to international prominence in the 1950s and early 1960s.

To restore the party's authority, Gomułka needed to re-establish working relations with the Church, which enjoyed support among peasants and the new industrial labour force often recruited from the religious countryside. He released Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński from a three-year long detention, reintroduced religious instruction in the public schools, and provided outlets for the Catholic intelligentsia. The former editors of *Tygodnik Powszechny*, who had been first suspended and then replaced by pro-regime Catholics in 1953, once again took over the publication of the weekly. A small number of independent Catholic candidates ran in the elections for parliament, where nine of them formed the Znak (Sign) caucus. The group's two leaders, Jerzy Zawieyski and Stanisław Stomma, had access to both Gomułka and Wyszyński. In response to these overtures, in January 1957 the episcopate urged Catholics to cast their votes in the general elections.

By the late 1950s and early 1960s Gomułka had backtracked, applying the brakes to reform and shifting to authoritarian positions. The honeymoon with the Church was over. In the fall of 1956, Wyszyński, the Primate of Poland, launched the Great Novena, a nine-year mass campaign of spiritual preparation for the millennial anniversary of Christianity in Poland. The focus of the celebrations of the Virgin Mary saw a replica of the holy icon of the Black Madonna of Częstochowa travel across the country from diocese to diocese. Gomułka was alarmed. Wyszyński's mobilization of popular religiosity had deep political implications. The Primate disentangled himself and his flock from the secular communist state and offered an alternative community, founded on ethno-religious identity. Both Wyszyński and Gomułka perceived themselves as great patriots and the unquestioned leaders of the nation: a new confrontation was inevitable. The communist leader pursued a strategy of calculated harassment. During the early 1960s, the government removed religious instruction from the public schools, cancelled building permits for new churches, and extended the military draft to clerics. The security police expanded the network of informers among the clergy and lay Catholics. The rest of the decade was marked by constant pitched battles, media and propaganda campaigns, and cultural wars that escalated

in 1965–66, during the rival anniversary ceremonies of the Polish Millennium. A détente in Church-State relations resumed only after Gomułka's fall in December 1970.

Religion and the Polish School

The production and release of MOTHER JOAN OF THE ANGELS took place during the Great Novena campaign, but months before the escalation of the Church-State conflict. The questions at hand are: How did the cinema of People's Poland deal with religion up to this point and during the Millennium battle? Did the regime conduct vast anti-clerical campaigns with the use of cinema? How did bishops assess the burgeoning Polish film industry? The answers to these questions are extremely nuanced.

To begin with, we must take a look at the use of film during Stalinism. Under the dictate of Socialist Realism, Polish cinema had excelled in producing factory production dramas, ideologically rigid biographical epics, vigilante thrillers about unmasking saboteurs, and light-hearted comedies. Both feature and documentary films tended to avoid Church-related subjects and, by extension, the growing oppression against members of the clergy. The exception was the state official newsreel service, Polska Kronika Filmowa (the Polish Film Chronicle), which reported on the 1953 show trial of Bishop Czesław Kaczmarek of Kielce — even though it did not inform about the subsequent arrest of Cardinal Stefan Wyszyński, Primate of Poland.

This curious absence of anti-clerical propaganda should be attributed to the regime's intention to not antagonize the Catholic masses. In the cases of Wyszyński and other detained clergymen, the government was keen to avoid turning them into martyrs. Above all, Socialist Realist cinema was not "atheist," in the sense that it did not directly attack the Christian religious worldview. Instead, it tried to secularize society by offering a vision of life without religion, and focused its criticism on the institution of the Church, bishops, priests, and specific manifestations of religiosity. To that end, the term "Catholic" was replaced by "clerical".[4]

Although de-Stalinization removed the doctrine of Socialist Realism, it did not bring a revolutionary change in the cinematic projections of religious themes. Religion did not seem to be on the radar of the Polish School. Focusing their lens on the wartime experience and offering therapy to the brutalized and politically confused war generation, Andrzej Munk, Andrzej Wajda, Jerzy Kawalerowicz, Kazimierz Kutz, Stanisław Różewicz, and Tadeusz Konwicki questioned the Polish patriotic canon and its glorification of romantic heroism and martyrdom. Sacrifice, one of the core themes of any religious doctrine and nationalist mythology, was approached with scepticism and caution. Here we should keep in mind that the historical and cultural revisionism of the Polish School attracted the criticism of Gomułka's watchdogs. The 1960 resolution of the Central Committee Secretariat of the party condemned some of these filmmakers for their pessimism, nihilism, Western influences, and opposition to the party programme.[5]

4) Kornacki, p. 55.

5) Tadeusz Miczka and Alina Madej (eds), *Syndrom konformizmu? Kino polskie lat sześćdziesiątych* (Katowice: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Śląskiego, 1994), pp. 27–32.

It is not to say that the directors of the Polish School completely abstained from engaging with religious motives. Wajda's memorable cinematography in POKOLENIE (A Generation, 1955), KANAŁ (Kanal, 1956) and POPIÓŁ I DIAMENT (Ashes and Diamonds, 1958) testifies to the director's frequent references to Catholic iconography. But religion and religiosity rarely stood at the central focus of Polish auteurs. It was a predominantly secularized milieu representative of the post-war progressive intelligentsia and their different personal backgrounds.[6] Indeed, as Krzysztof Kornacki argues, religious faith was the domain of secondary characters, whereas the main protagonists, male and female alike, displayed no interest in religion.[7] But to say that Wajda and other luminaries of the Polish School expressed disinterest in the society (that is, "religious society") that surrounded them is an overstatement. In his CELULOZA (Cellulose, 1954), a coming-out-age story of a young proletarian-turned communist, Jerzy Kawalerowicz presented a bleak image of interwar Poland, with its poverty, ignorance, anti-Semitism, and authoritarian government. One of the villains is a young Catholic priest who warns workers against the triple dangers of Communism, moral decadence, and Jews. Similar views combined with a contempt for working class youths came from the mouth of a chaplain in Wajda's A GENERATION. The profound anti-modernism, conservatism, bigotry, and anti-Semitism of the pre-war Polish Church were hard facts, not figments of the filmmakers' imaginations.

Wajda and Kawalerowicz directed their respective films in the waning years of Stalinism when rules of ideological orthodoxy still needed to be observed. During the Thaw and its aftermath a number of Polish filmmakers, both those close to the party and sceptics alike, made movies critical of the clergy, but not about religion per se. One notable exception was Jerzy Hoffman's and Edward Skórzewski's documentary PAMIĄTKA Z KALWARII (A Souvenir from Calvary 1958) about a pilgrimage to Kalwaria Zebrzydowska, one of the main religious centres in Poland. The directors filmed the site and the thousands of faithful there in the fashion of *Cinéma vérité*, without any off-camera commentary. This quasi-anthropological method did not sit well with censors who delayed the film's release until 1966, the year of the Millennium celebrations. Following several closed screenings with pre-selected and interviewed audiences, Ryszard Koniczek of the Department of Culture in the Central Committee of the party, assured his bosses that the majority of viewers interpreted the film as the portrayal of social backwardness and religious fanaticism.[8]

Even more controversial was Kazimierz Kutz's feature MILCZENIE (Silence, 1963). Based on Jerzy Szczygieł's autobiographical novel, the movie was an Ingmar Bergmanesque tale of a teenage war orphan, Stach (Mirosław Kobierzycki), who loses his sight after playing with explosives. Falsely accused of trying to murder a local parish priest (Kazimierz Fabisiak), he becomes the object of intense hatred, humiliation, and ostracism from the local community. The priest, who knows the truth and commands great respect among

6) While Munk and Kawalerowicz were atheists, Kutz declared himself as an agnostic. The cases of Wajda, Konwicki, and Różewicz are less clear. All three were raised in patriotic and practicing families. Yet the wartime experience constituted a dramatic turn. Konwicki fought in the guerilla units of the Home Army (Armia Krajowa, AK). Wajda also served in the AK and his father, a career military officer, was shot by the Soviets in the spring of 1940. All of these directors entered adulthood at the end of the war years and studied during the Stalinist period.

7) Kornacki, pp. 256–257.

8) Kornacki, p. 216.

the faithful, fails to help the boy, mostly due to the indecisiveness and cowardice caused by his impending senility. With help of a young nurse, Stach regains his internal strength and leaves the forsaken town, whereas the priest loses his prestige among locals and goes into lonely retirement. Rather than formulating an outright attack on the Church, the movie deals with the tragic fate of social outcasts, a society brutalized by war, social apathy, and intolerance generated by trauma and all-encompassing violence. According to Kutz, "some people expected an anti-clerical movie, whereas Catholics hoped that it would not hurt their feelings; I did not please either of the sides."[9] He instead aimed to make a film about an individual priest who is struck by dotage.

The records of the Script Assessment and the Film Approval Commissions not only reassert this view, but also present a much more nuanced picture. Everybody praised the film's courage and richness. SILENCE was a macabre, shocking portrayal of collective cruelty and social pathologies. "I demand a cruel and scary film," declared movie critic Krzysztof Teodor Toeplitz. "In this respect, *Silence* satisfies my appetite." He also saw the movie as likely to offend Catholics and the episcopate. "For believers and people sympathetic to or even tolerant of the Church, the character of the priest will be unacceptable." Filmmaker Aleksander Ścibor-Rylski opposed any changes in the script, particularly those that would humanize the priest. "I think that if the film takes a stronger anti-clerical line than our cinema has done so far, then we can afford it in 1962," he said. "We know that the attitude of the clergy toward us has become more hostile." Both Kutz and Szczygieł, the author of the script, suggested that the assessors somehow misinterpreted the character of the priest. According to the director, the priest was not a scoundrel, but a tragic figure unable to take a firm stance due to senile dementia. Chairman Tadeusz Zaorski, head of the Cinematography Committee, was not pleased with this interpretation, but approved the production of the movie.[10]

When the Film Approval Commission met in May 1963 to discuss the film's distribution, there here was significant dissonance between party officials and filmmakers. The presence of Artur Starewicz, head of the Press Bureau of the Central Committee of the party, testified to the seriousness of the matter. In fact, Starewicz voiced strong reservations about the film and even questioned the original decision to allow its production. Although he did not view SILENCE as an anti-clerical movie, he anticipated hostile reactions, particularly in small-town Poland, and limited commercial success. Starewicz's solution was startling: while opposing the distribution of the film in Poland, he recommended exporting it and sending to international festivals.[11]

Filmmakers present at the meeting unanimously supported and praised Kutz's film. Jerzy Pomianowski of the Syrena production unit openly disagreed with Starewicz's recommendations. "Here we have an outstanding film [...], which should not be hidden from our audiences [...]", he stated. Ścibor-Rylski was even more militant: "We have an opportunity to influence society in the spirit of secularization; either we can show that certain problems do not matter or we can point to these values, which our society lacks." True,

9) Aleksandra Klich, *Cały ten Kutz. Biografia niepokorna* (Kraków: Znak, 2009), p. 99.
10) Filmoteka Narodowa, Komisja Ocen Scenariuszy, A-214 poz. 277 (10 July 1962), *Milczenie*.
11) Filmoteka Narodowa, Komisja Kolaudacyjna, A-216 poz. 1 (15 May 1963), *Milczenie*.

SILENCE attacked bigotry and obscurantism, but it did not show disrespect for religiosity. For Toeplitz, Kutz's film was neither clerical nor anti-clerical. While MOTHER JOAN OF THE ANGELS attacked the institution of the convent, SILENCE had much in common with the prose of Catholic authors such as Graham Greene and Georges Bernanos. "Of course, if this film enters mass distribution it will be a dance party invitation for the episcopate," he joked. Zaorski clearly sympathised with the opinions of the filmmakers. In order to pacify Starewicz, he recommended preliminary screenings for small audiences.[12] The film premiered at the Venice Film Festival in 1963, went into distribution in Poland in September of the same year, and featured in retrospectives of Polish cinema in France, West Germany, and Brazil. As predicted, SILENCE precipitated official protests from Polish bishops who accused it of defaming religious feelings and the clergy.[13]

Far more anti-clerical and anti-religious was DREWNIANY RÓŻANIEC (A Wooden Rosary, 1965) by Ewa and Czeslaw Petelski. Based on an autobiographical novel by Natalia Rolleczek, the film lambasted the intolerable conditions, obscurantist pedagogy, and hypocrisy reigning in a pre-war orphanage for girls run by Catholic nuns. Unlike Kutz's SILENCE, which concludes on a somewhat optimistic note, the Petelskis' film offers no redemption. One nun replaces another and the gloomy existence of orphans continues, and will presumably persist as long as the Church remains in charge. The film divided members of the Film Approval Commission. While Tadeusz Konwicki criticized its sluggish pace, Minister of Culture Tadeusz Galiński saw it as depressing and likened the orphanage to a concentration camp. Wincenty Kraśko, head of the Department of Culture in the Central Committee of the Party, downplayed the film's anti-religious message, emphasizing instead that it targeted bad nuns and even followed the teachings of Pope John XXIII. Yet even he criticized the directors for not doing enough to elaborate on the historical context of the 1930s. Tadeusz Zaorski wondered whether it was the nuns or the actual poverty of pre-war Poland that should be held accountable for the mistreatment of the girls. Czesław Petelski did not hide his intentions: "Obviously, we did not count on (the acceptance of) Catholic viewers; they can cast malicious slurs on us."[14] Yet, speaking at the meeting of the Script Assessment Commission in 1963, he openly lamented: "I completely agree that if we wanted to make an atheist film, which undermines the existence of God, we would not be able to do it in this country."[15]

Indeed, in comparison to Western European cinema, the Polish socialist film industry produced only a small number of anti-clerical film, never rivalling the rebellious zeal of Luis Buñuel or Federico Fellini's flamboyant mockery. Since the late 1950s filmmakers faced another scrutinizing body, which did not have any role in approving or banning film productions, but could easily influence the reception of any movie in Poland. In 1957 Polish bishops set up the Bureau of Episcopate's Commission for Film, Television, Radio and Theatre under the leadership of Reverend Kazimierz Chudy, SJ.

The Bureau divided assessed films into four categories: forbidden, not recommended, approved with serious reservations, and recommended. Its recommendations were com-

12) Ibid.
13) Kornacki, pp. 216, 386.
14) Filmoteka Narodowa, Komisja Kolaudacyjna, A-216, poz. 27 (11 June 1964), *Drewniany różaniec*.
15) Kornacki, p. 23.

municated to the Episcopate, which forwarded them to dioceses. Local priests could use their pulpits and informal councils to influence their parish flocks. The recommendations included some films for and about children, but also such patriotic blockbusters as Aleksander Ford's mega-production KRZYŻACY (Knights of the Teutonic Order, 1960), the most popular film in the history of Polish cinema history. A landmark of National Communism and its vision of Polish history, the movie glorified the Polish-Lithuanian victory over the Teutonic Knights in 1410 and lambasted West German revanchism. At the same time, the Bureau condemned such achievements of the Polish School as Wajda's ASHES AND DIAMONDS, Munk's EROICA, Petelski's BAZA LUDZI UMARŁYCH (The Depot of the Dead, 1959), and Kutz's NIKT NIE WOŁA (Nobody's Calling, 1960). Ironically, the verdict of church experts mirrored that of the party government. While the Church admonished these films for anti-religiosity and amorality (with a strong emphasis on sexual scenes), the regime accused them of pessimism, rehabilitating the Home Army resistance, bourgeois formalism, and lack of endorsement for the political system.[16] However, Jerzy Kawalerowicz's two films, POCIĄG (Night Train, 1959) and MOTHER JOAN OF THE ANGELS, were in fact blacklisted by the Bureau of the Episcopate. Frequent references to the second title voiced at numerous script and film assessment meetings throughout the 1960s attest to the pivotal role of Kawalerowicz's film in bringing the subject of religion to movie screens in socialist Poland.

Mother Joan of the Angels: Director, Movie, Reception

Throughout his long career, Kawalerowicz always explored the entrapment of individuals by politics, worldviews, social codes, and war. His protagonists, often ambitious and sensitive, search for the meaning of their existence against restrictions imposed by socio-political, religious, and economic systems. Caught in webs of intrigue and subject to collective pressures, they struggle to retain their integrity, but end up paying the ultimate price: getting killed, betrayed, misunderstood, alienated and abandoned. It was these universal themes that placed the director outside the mainstream of Polish cinema, which tended to convey a highly national perspective. His unique visual style, stemming from a poetic imaginary and a painterly eye, oscillated between projections of vast, barren landscapes and claustrophobic, enclosed spaces. Like his contemporary Wajda, Kawalerowicz studied fine arts before moving into filming, but always avoided a baroque style.

Kawalerowicz's own biography, which included numerous conflict-ridden choices, bore significant resemblance to the dilemmas of the characters that populated his works. Even though he remained a communist party member from 1954 to 1990, Kawalerowicz actively struggled against the ideological pressures imposed on Polish filmmakers, first in his capacity as director of the Kadr Film Production Unit, and later as the President of the Association of Polish Filmmakers. Nevertheless, during the Martial Law period, to the dismay of numerous colleagues and friends, he sided with the regime. An atheist, Kawale-

16) Kornacki, pp. 31–32.

rowicz made his exit from filmmaking by directing the lavish blockbuster Quo Vadis, an adaptation of Henryk Sienkiewicz's novel about the persecution of early Christians in ancient Rome.

Kawalerowicz's early work reflected the turbulent politics of Stalinism and the impending Thaw. After directing Gromada (The Village Mill, 1951), a compulsory Socialist Realist film, he embarked on much more complex projects, which, if they had been released earlier, could have established him as a pioneering filmmaker. His film Cellulose, which was set in the 1930s and depicts the tough life of the proletarian worker Szczęsny and his transformation into a communist, still partly followed the dictates of Socialist Realism, while also displaying a number of revolutionary innovations. It was probably the first Polish work to utilize and build upon the Neo-Realist approach to filmmaking. Superbly acted and dynamic, the film also contained strong dose of eroticism, which was a complete novelty in the puritan world of communist cinema. Made in 1953 (the year of Stalin's death), but released in 1954 as the Thaw was unfolding, Cellulose had a much weaker impact than it deserved.

His next film, the Rashomon-like Cień (Shadow, 1956), met a similar end. A man jumps off a train and dies. The authorities fail to identify him because he has no papers and his face is completely mutilated. Several characters try to guess who he was by linking him to their own past actions. In the first segment, two groups of resistance fighters having been misled by an agent provocateur massacre each other in a gunfight. The second part recalls the struggle of the security services against anti-communist guerrillas. When a police officer infiltrates the enemy, he is betrayed and narrowly escapes capture by killing everyone in the scene. Was his comrade a traitor or did the officer lose his nerve? In the final segment, a young worker is led astray by a saboteur and unleashes a deadly accident in the factory. The saboteur escapes. Could the dead man be him? The ideological platform of Shadow (communist resisters, heroic security police, and evil spies) overshadowed its cinematic merits such as expressionist camera work, a plot that mixed flashbacks with a linear narrative, and an open ending. Kawalerowicz's next work, Prawdziwy koniec wielkiej wojny (The Real End of the Great War, 1957) was an artistically less savvy, but equally riveting story of a traumatized concentration camp inmate who is unable to recover his sanity, re-connect with his wife, or function in the reality of peacetime.

His breakthrough came in 1959, with the release of Night Train. Set almost entirely in the eponymous night train heading towards the Baltic Sea coast, the film examines several characters who meet by accident: a young woman running away from her lover, a surgeon whose patient died on an operating table, the flirtatious wife of an elderly lawyer, a priest with a flock of pilgrims, and a murderer on the run. Each of them is lonely, and each one carries trauma. Nocturnal conversations reveal the passengers' thirst for love, empathy, and fulfilment. In the early morning hours, they witness the near lynching of the murderer. Shortly after the train reaches its destination, the passengers part ways. The universal character of the film was not missed by the jury of the Venice International Film Festival, which awarded Kawalerowicz the Georges Méliès prize and presented actress Lucyna Winnicka (also Kawalerowicz's wife) with an honourable distinction for her performance. Night Train also enjoyed a positive reception at home, though local film critics

seemed to ignore its universality and instead praised the director for capturing the microcosm of Polish contemporary society.[17]

One year later, Kawalerowicz directed his best-known film, MOTHER JOAN OF THE ANGELS, which gained him as much fame and prestige, as it did notoriety. The movie begins after the execution of Reverend Garniec, who had been accused of a pact with the Devil that led to the possession of Joan (Lucyna Winnicka), Mother Superior of a remote convent. Joan refuses to repent and is subjected to public exorcisms that seem to have no effect. Meanwhile, the possession spreads throughout the convent. By the time the Jesuit investigator Reverend Suryn (Mieczysław Voit) arrives, all but one of the nuns, Sister Margaret (Anna Ciepielewska), claim to be possessed. Soon, Suryn is drawn to Joan who claims to be possessed by several demons. Instead of bringing calm and ending the spell, he descends into anxiety, doubt, despair, and madness. In fact, he falls in love with Joan, but refuses to admit it. Instead he interprets his emotional state as the work of the Devil. Suryn concludes that in order to save Joan he must absorb her demons. He decides to commit a mortal sin, which will deprive him of salvation, but will save Joan. He hacks to death innocent stable boys. Joan learns about Suryn's act from Margaret who has been seduced and abandoned by a young nobleman. As both women cry, their moans drown out the sound of a tolling bell.

It is tempting to interpret Kawalerowicz's film as a study of sexuality repressed by religious fanaticism. Both Suryn and Joan subject themselves to self-flagellation and Suryn runs away from Joan after she tries to kiss him. Reverend Brym (Kazimierz Fabisiak), a parish priest and one of a few voices of reason in this dark tale, denounces the exorcists who conduct their séances in public in the convent's chapel: "They say that if the people see the Devil, their faith in God and the Church grows. That's why they show such things to the people." Suryn replies, "Can you bring God to a man through the Devil?" To which Brym answers, "Who knows, Father [...]. Unless there are no devils in here at all."

The problem with this interpretation is that the devil constantly lurks throughout Kawalerowicz's movie: the devil of lust when the nobleman seduces Margaret only to desert her; the devil of hubris when Joan declares that if "one cannot be a saint, it's better of be damned;" the character of a petite nobleman, Wołodkiewicz, who is the spitting image of a devil from a folk tale and who corrupts all those around him; Reverend Garniec's illegitimate children who constantly play a game of lambs and wolves. The film's visual imagery only reinforces this notion, for example with the moon-like landscape that surrounds the white-walled convent or the dim, dark inn, where locals and guests alike indulge in drinking and sex and comment on Joan's possession like a choir in a Greek tragedy, and also where Suryn stays and kills the stable boys. Between these two buildings stands the stake at which Garniec was burned. If Kawalerowicz had aimed to make his film just for the sake of visual beauty and formalistic experiment, then the result is a success.

But there are other interpretations of MOTHER JOAN OF THE ANGELS and this vicissitude of approaches makes it even more fascinating. The first one is that of feminism. Joan comes from an aristocratic family and being a nun does not suit her pride. In her final con-

17) Maria Oleksiewicz, 'Niebezpieczeństwa pewnej podróży', *Film*, vol. 14, no. 39 (1959), p. 4. See also Błażej Hrapkowicz, 'Pociąg', *Kino*, vol. 44, no. 1 (2010), pp. 50–51.

versation with Suryn, she admits that she loathes her life in the convent. "Does eating beans in oil every day and praying constitute the path to salvation? I do not want such salvation," she exclaims. While flirting with her would-be seducer, Sister Margaret sings the following lines: "I would rather sing with the nuns in the convent than take a husband and much trouble of it. I would not mind singing matins at cold daybreak if this could save me from a husband's beatings." While seeking advice from a rabbi, who is his doppelganger, Suryn asks if women suffer. "Let them," answers the rabbi. "That's their fate." The priest wants to learn about the demons that have possessed Joan, but the rabbi is quick to point that the Jesuit is talking about his own demons. He scorns Suryn for wanting to learn too much too quickly. "Do you want to know all about demons? Let them enter your soul." Yet, he also declares, "I too know nothing." Can religion and theology provide the answers that men seek? Kawalerowicz doubts it, but does not rule it out. Indeed, the movie's protagonists are enmeshed in religious discourse and cultural conventions. One has to agree with a contemporary critic who interprets Kawalerowicz's movie as a tale that demonstrates the impact of culture on individuals if not that of cultural determinism.[18]

Kawalerowicz and his scriptwriter Tadeusz Konwicki, himself a notable writer and filmmaker, stripped the plot from all historical embellishment and focused instead on "human nature [...] and two elements that shape it, love and faith." The director said, "The protagonists are people in cassocks who in the name of 'great love' preached by religion kill (their own) human love." Kawalerowicz had wanted to make this film a few years earlier, after SHADOW and before THE REAL END OF THE GREAT WAR but did not succeed.[19] He never fully elaborated on the reasons for this delay. It is plausible that his decision had to do with the brief thaw in Church-State relations in 1956–57. The transcript of the Script Assessment Commission, which met to evaluate Kawalerowicz's and Konwicki's text in January 1960 confirms this impression. At least ten people attended the meeting, among them Tadeusz Zaorski, deputy Minister of Culture and head of the Committee of Cinematography; Jerzy Putrament, a party big wig, diplomat, and writer; Stanisław Dygat, a popular writer and celebrity among the Polish artistic intelligentsia; several cinematographers and film critics; as well as Konwicki and Kawalerowicz. All participants praised the script and recommended its production, yet a sense of tension and uncertainty prevailed.

"While facing Catholic obscurantism," said Dygat, "I recommend adventurous steps, not the government's current policy, which I consider too hesitant." Cinematographer Ludwik Starski expressed even more zeal, suggesting the removal of all motifs that indicated insanity and the emphasis on a contemporary perspective. "Everything is presented in the context of the mentality in that period, in the context of a belief in the Devil" he complained. "This movie is somehow Catholic; we may believe that protagonists actually converse with Satan, who enters her (Mother Joan) and re-enters him (Father Suryn)." Putrament fully endorsed the script and pointed to the paramount importance of this project.

18) Krzysztof Świrek, 'Matka Joanna od Aniołów', *Kino*, vol. 44, no. 3 (2010), pp. 41–43. For other compelling interpretations of MOTHER JOAN OF THE ANGELS, see Alicja Helman, '*Matka Joanna od aniołów* — przesłanie którego nie ma w opowiadaniu', *Kino*, vol. 20, no. 4 (1986), pp. 1–3, 26–28 and Seweryn Kuśmierczyk, 'Szkic antropologiczny', *Kwartalnik Filmowy*, vol. 18, no. 17 (1997), pp. 78–84.

19) 'O swoich i cudzych filmach oraz o "Matce Joannie od Aniołów" mowi Jerzy Kawalerowicz', *Nowa Kultura*, vol. 9, no. 51–52 (1960), p. 10.

He asked Zaorski whether the details of Gomułka's meeting with Primate Wyszyński were already known. The outcome of the encounter between the party leader and the cardinal was likely to determine the future of Church-State relations in People's Poland. Putrament was pessimistic about the future of Kawalerowicz's project. In fact, he seemed to be provoking the authorities. "I talked about the meeting between Wiesław (Gomułka's wartime code name) and Wyszyński, and I am sure that in spite of its artistic value, they will be scared of the script, that they will not approve it for production," he cautioned. Still, Putrament recommended supporting Kawalerowicz and putting the movie into production. He described the film as not only anti-obscurantist, but also Freudian. "I came here because I think that you have a great weapon in your hand," he concluded. "You have the weapon that can hit very hard, but it can also do a lot of harm." Putrament expressed concerns about the pivotal scene, the conversation between Suryn and the rabbi, and hinted at a possibility of anti-Semitic resentment. "Here we have two systems of superstition, and this is quite explosive in our (Polish) situation. People will say, 'what have they done to priests?'-- the script indicates that the only wise man is a Jewish rabbi."[20]

Zdzisław Skowroński, a prominent script-writer, who could not attend the meeting, sent his comments. On the one hand, he praised the filmmakers for their courage to confront Catholicism and its pathologies; on the other, he charged Kawalerowicz and Konwicki with leniency in the treatment of the subject. Accordingly, the script lacked the power of Arthur Miller's *The Crucible*, which unmasked fanaticism and the complicity of ordinary people. As it stood now, the script did not go beyond showing a dozen "hysterical women." Skowroński doubted whether the film would appeal to mass audiences. Konwicki riposted that he and Kawalerowicz intended to make a film that would demonstrate fear and human demons, but would not cause any harm or mock anybody.[21] That was why they decided to focus on the romantic motive of Suryn's love for Joan, who, in contrast to Iwaszkiewicz's novella, would not be a mentally disturbed hunchback, but someone viewers could empathize with. Kawalerowicz added that he was not interested in offering a political and historical treatise; nor did he intend to present the nuns as hysteric and psychotic characters possessed by persecutory delusion. Rather, he aimed at examining human emotions and faith. Zaorski's closing remarks signalled the intentions of the authorities. The film carried significant risk, but, if well crafted, could influence the working class masses and contribute to the struggle against fideism. Sympathy for the protagonists should not obscure the atrocious conditions under which they operated. "There is no need

20) Filmoteka Narodowa, Komisja Ocen Scenariuszy, A-214 poz. 142 (26 January 1960), *Matka Joanna od aniołow*. Putrament's concerns about Polish anti-Semitism were closely related to his own biography. As a student, Putrament was a member of nationalist and anti-Semitic organizations All-Poland Youth and Camp of Great Poland. In the mid 1930s, he moved from the nationalist right to communism. Putrament features in Czesław Milosz's *The Captive Mind* as Gamma.

21) Ibid. In an interview given in 1974, Kawalerowicz confirmed that while preparing the script, he and Konwicki surveyed the literature on Loudun. "One of the sources we surveyed were court medical records that diagnosed Mother Joan as schizophrenia and having an imaginary pregnancy," he said. "The historical Mother Joan was handicapped and mentally ill, but I did not intend to show a psychopath, a character who could arouse distaste among viewers." Jerzy Kawalerowicz, 'Nie podrabiać historii', *Film*, vol. 2, no. 17 (1974), p. 12.

to convince Kawalerowicz to make a good movie," he concluded. "He has excellent material in hand."[22]

Following the meeting, Kawalerowicz and Konwicki prepared the "directors' explication," in which they reiterated their goals. They had clearly learned their lesson — the explication related and adhered to those opinions voiced at the meeting of the Commission that emphasized a contemporary reading of their film. The film was to be a "polemic piece struggling for a materialist understanding of human nature." In a biting reference to the Marian apparitions that blossomed during the Great Novena campaign, Kawalerowicz and Konwicki declared that their story could have taken place both in the past when witches were burned at the stake and in the present, when "miracles still happened in some European capitals." They also accented the following priorities: the centrality of a love theme and its conflict with the attitudes imposed by religion; instilling empathy with the protagonists and their plight; a universal message; and absence of propagandist themes. They indicated the scarcity of liturgy in the movie in order to avoid accusations of blasphemy.[23]

These assurances were well received by the authorities. The movie was completed in the fall of 1960 and premiered in February 1961. It received positive reviews from Polish film critics, although a few criticized Kawalerowicz for removing the historical context of the Counter-Reformation, which was central to Iwaszkiewicz's novella.[24] While reviewing the film for *Ekran* magazine, Stefan Morawski deemed it too abstract and open-ended, with an unresolved narrative. According to him, Kawalerowicz's movie wavered between fideism and atheism, addressed the presence of demons, and dismissed them as a silly play.[25] However, the majority of prominent critics welcomed MOTHER JOAN OF ANGELS as "one of the most outstanding achievements of Polish cinema", to quote Bolesław Michałek.[26]

The Polish episcopate could not disagree more with this appraisal, however. Its secretary, Bishop Zygmunt Choromański, submitted three letters on 13 February 1961, one to the Minister of Culture and Arts, another to the Government's representative for Church-State relations, and the third to the Prosecutor General of the Polish People's Republic. All of them concerned Kawalerowicz's film, which was denounced as a blasphemous, atheistic, and deeply offensive to the Church and its congregation. "The whole movie," wrote Choromański, "mocks religious practices, church ceremonies and prayers; it intends to defame life in convents and the priesthood."[27] Choromański cited the 1949 government decree on the freedom of conscience and religion, which prescribed prison sentences for anybody defaming religious feelings or attacking a specific congregation. He appealed to the government to ban the film. Bishop Jerzy Modzelewski of Warsaw described MOTHER

22) FN, KOS, A-214 poz. 142.
23) Kornacki, pp. 227–228, 240.
24) Wacław Sadkowski, 'Matka Joanna od Aniołów', *Trybuna Ludu*, 11 February 1961.
25) Stefan Morawski, 'Ani ziemia ani niebo', *Ekran*, vol. 5, no. 14 (1961), p. 10.
26) Bolesław Michałek, 'Matka Joanna na targowisku', *Nowa Kultura*, vol. 10, no. 20 (1961), p. 10.
27) Letter from the episcopate to the Minister of Culture and Arts, Tadeusz Galiński, 13 November 1961. In: Peter Raina, *Kościół katolicki a państwo w świetle dokumentów, 1945–1989*, Volume 2: 1960–1974 (Poznań, 1995), pp. 86–87.

Joan of Angels as anti-religious and vulgar. In all probability, the bishop had not even seen the movie since he referred to it using a wording that would suggest a contemporary piece: "This film [...] distorts the life of nuns in convents, defames chaplains, and presents the character of prayers and ecclesiastical practices in a false way."[28]

The fact that Catholic bishops protested about a film release to the communist authorities testifies to the strength of the Church in post-Stalinist Poland, merely seven years after Stalin's death and Wyszyński's arrest. It is both ironic and foreboding, in the context of the democratic opposition of the 1970s, that on this occasion the bishops supported themselves with the appropriate legal and constitutional stipulations of the communist state. But Reverend Chudy of the Bureau of Episcopate's Commission for Film, Television, Radio and Theatre was in no mood for jokes when he classified Kawalerowicz's film as 'forbidden', the category reserved for those movies, plays, and broadcasts that stood contrary to Christian faith.[29] Nor was the Primate of Poland: in one of his sermons, Cardinal Wyszyński described Kawalerowicz's work as "a glove thrown into the face of the Polish Catholic nation."[30] Parish priests appealed to laymen to boycott screenings of the movie. The launch of a crusade against the movie was not lost on the *Nowa Kultura* weekly, which published a cartoon depicting numerous people queuing to see Mother Joan of Angels. Those leaving the cinema are pictured having devil's horns, hooves, and tails.[31] It is clear that Polish bishops and their cultural watchdogs did not keep up with the evolution of cinema; nor did they care about the artistic content of contextualization displayed by films relating to Catholicism.[32] Their relationship with the 10th muse oscillated between the socio-cultural conservatism of the pre-war days and nationalistic projections familiar to the cinema of National Communism, which utilized Aleksander Ford's epic on the 1410 Battle of Grunwald for Germanophobia, one of the pillars of state-sanctioned ethnic nationalism in 1960s Poland.

Yet Catholic activists and journalists linked to Znak and *Tygodnik Powszechny* who often expressed deep reservations about Wyszyński's focus on the cult of the Virgin Mary, his use of plebeian Catholicism, and mass celebrations did not share the bishops' outrage about Mother Joan of the Angels.[33] Jacek Woźniakowski's review of the film in *Tygodnik Powszechny* attests to a more nuanced reception of Kawalerowicz's work. "I did not have the impression that the film constituted a blasphemous attack on religion," wrote Woźniakowski.[34] But he did have mixed feelings. On the one hand, it was a high-calibre work, much more serious than suggested by rumours; on the other, the film reduced reli-

28) Letter from Bishop Jerzy Modzelewski to the Presidium of the National Council in Warsaw, 13 February 1961. In: *Przegląd*, vol. 3, no. 6 (2001), p. 19.

29) Kornacki, p. 386.

30) Henryk Mach, 'Matka Joanna i Episkopat,' *Słowo Polskie* vol. 17, no. 115 (1961), p. 8.

31) *Nowa Kultura*, vol. 10, no. 8 (1961), p. 10.

32) Kornacki, p. 32.

33) Zawieyski considered the travelling replica of the Black Madonna of Czestochowa obscurantist and far from authentic religiosity. Stomma tried to win the Primate over to the idea of "the Church of quiet work," active in pastoral missions in the parishes, rather than in grand religious spectacles. See Mikołaj Stanisław Kunicki, *Between the Brown and the Red: Nationalism, Catholicism, and Communism in 20th-Century Poland — The Politics of Bolesław Piasecki* (Athens: Ohio University Press, 2012), p. 122.

34) Quoted in Kornacki, p. 244–245.

gious faith to the level of pathology and dismissed the spiritual life of the Catholic clergy. In its treatment of possessions, MOTHER JOAN OF THE ANGELS suffered from misconceptions similar to those that were endorsed by 17th-century exorcists. "It is naïve," wrote Woźniakowski, "to reduce this mysterious phenomenon only to mental disorder, just as it was naive in the past to interpret mental sickness as possession."[35] There is no doubt that the Church's campaign against MOTHER JOAN OF THE ANGELS affected its commercial success in Poland.[36] On the other hand, the episcopate's attacks helped the filmmakers in gaining the approval and support of those party dignitaries and pundits, who, under different circumstances, could accuse them of cultivating 'bourgeois formalism'.

A few months after its release in Poland, MOTHER JOAN OF THE ANGELS was the official Polish submission to the Cannes Film Festival. Both the Vatican and the Polish episcopate tried unsuccessfully to have the film withdrawn from competition and banned in France.[37] Instead, Kawalerowicz's work won the Special Jury Prize. While reminiscing years later on his success in Cannes, the director hints that the pressure applied on the jury by the Church cost him the major prize.[38] Considering the verdict in Cannes in 1961, Kawalerowicz's complaints made little sense. The winner of the Palme d'Or that year was Luis Bunuel's iconoclastic VIRIDIANA, condemned by the Vatican as blasphemous, which shared the prize with the quickly forgotten UNE AUSSI LONGUE ABSENCE (*The Long Absence*, 1961), directed by Henri Colpi. Clearly, the director of MOTHER JOAN OF THE ANGELS tried to present himself as the victim of a priest-led witch-hunt.

Kawalerowicz's claims that he did not intend to make an anti-religious film or anti-Church propaganda had a sympathetic response in Great Britain and the U.S.A., where critics praised MOTHER JOAN OF THE ANGELS for its artistic quality, psychological content, and multitude of possible interpretations, while downplaying the political message of the movie.[39] However, some important voices from the French cinephile community proved less accommodating toward the Polish director. While reviewing MOTHER JOAN OF THE ANGELS in *Cahiers du Cinéma*, still firmly located on the political right, Jacques Siclier questioned Kawalerowicz's courage and impartiality — partly because the director was an atheist, and partly because he was not interested in exploring satanic possessions, mysticism, and monastic communities. By focusing on a "psychological case" and providing a "physiological explanation," Kawalerowicz showed "the bankruptcy of the idealist position."[40] In this respect, Siclier's reaction was close to the conclusions reached by Jacek Woźniakowski in *Tygodnik Powszechny*. But, the Frenchman also interpreted MOTHER JOAN OF THE ANGELS more broadly as a protest against dogmatism. "If his film is negative in its conclusions," Siclier wrote, "it is because Kawalerowicz, just like all the other Polish

35) Ibid.
36) Kornacki, p. 214.
37) Bolesław Michałek, 'Matka Joanna na targowisku', *Nowa Kultura*, vol. 10, no. 20 (1961), p. 10.
38) Jerzy Kawalerowicz, 'Nie podrabiać historii', *Film*, vol. 2, no. 17 (1974), p. 12.
39) Ernest Callenbach, '*Mother Joan of the Angels*', *Film Quarterly* vol. 17, no. 2 (1963–64), pp. 28–31; H.H., 'Joan of the Angels?' *Films in Review*, vol. 13, no. 5 (1962), pp. 294–295.
40) Jacques Siclier, 'Paphnuce et les chacals (*Mère Jeanne des Anges*)', *Cahiers du Cinéma*, vol. 21, no. 121 (1961), p. 56.

filmmakers and intellectuals, is obsessed by the idea of the destruction of an individual imprisoned in the inhuman straitjacket of contemporary ideologies."[41]

Kawalerowicz returned to religious themes in four later films. In FARAON (Pharaoh, 1966), a young Egyptian monarch unsuccessfully rebels against the power of omnipotent priests who control the kingdom's finances, exploit peasants, and engage in secret agreements with external enemies. It was an adaptation of Bolesław Prus's 19th-century novel. Considering the time of its release, which coincided with the climax of the millennium celebrations, the movie could be interpreted from a contemporary perspective. However, PHARAOH tends to focus less on religion and more on the rituals of power, reflecting on the reality of Gomułka's brand of socialism and the Little Stabilization.[42] Packed with hundreds of extras, lavishly filmed, containing daring erotic scenes, PHARAOH was a blockbuster and an Oscar nominee for best foreign language film. The Yugoslav-Italian MADDALENA (1971) is the story of an unfulfilled love between a beautiful girl and a priest, who doubts his ability to cope with celibacy. An artistic and critical flop, the movie is best known for the two songs composed by Ennio Morricone, "Chi Mai" and "Come Maddalena." AUSTERIA (The Inn, 1983) is about the long gone population of Chasidic Jews that had inhabited and fled the eastern borderlands of the Dual Monarchy during the initial days of the First World War. Rather than contrasting religious belief with an impending catastrophe, Kawalerowicz directed "a film about an extinct world, a community now dead, its culture, customs, habits, religion."[43] Kawalerowicz's farewell film, QUO VADIS (2001), was a lavish adaptation of Henryk Sienkiewicz's novel. With the exception of PHARAOH, these later religious-themed films were not on a level comparable with MOTHER JOAN OF THE ANGELS.

Conclusions

The small, but artistically significant group of Polish films that tackled Catholic religiosity and its relationship with modernity remains a curious phenomenon in the cinema of People's Poland. It is tempting to read every Polish film from the 1960s that dealt with religious, supernatural, or spiritual motives as a contribution to the state's battle against the Church.[44] However, this approach is problematic. One did not have to wait until the fall of Gomułka from power in December 1970 to see characters of good and likable priests in Polish movies. Rather than guarding the mystery of sacrum, these chaplains are portrayed as the pillars of the local community. Rarely discussing politics and theological matters, instead they try to serve members of their community by offering advice, peaceful ges-

41) Ibid. p. 57.

42) Jan Rek, *Kino Jerzego Kawalerowicza i jego konteksty* (Łódź: Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Łódzkiego, 2008), p. 127.

43) Marek Haltof, *Polish National Cinema* (New York and Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2002), p. 225.

44) Although I greatly value Krzysztof Kornacki's book, *Kino polskie wobec katolicyzmu*, I think that the author has repeated Rev. Chudy's mistake of indicting all films that included any spiritual, religious, Catholic, or church motives as anti-clerical and anti-Catholic.

tures, and rites of passage such as baptism, weddings, and funerals.[45] The explosion of genre cinema in Gomułka's Poland in the mid-1960s might have humanized the figure of a local parish priest on socialist screens. Comedies, romances, and even thrillers and combat dramas often included the figure of a Catholic priest or monk closely connected to his flock, detached from world politics, and devoid of fanaticism. Even veterans of the Polish School such as Kutz explored popular, folk religiosity in its positive, community-unifying aspects in SÓL ZIEMI CZARNEJ (Salt of the Black Earth, 1970) about Upper Silesia.

But genre cinema, conformist and complacent with messages approved by the party, could not sustain the projections of religiosity, Catholicism, and religion in Polish cinema. For this, Polish cinema needed not only new, less ideology-driven leaders, who would negotiate an armistice with the Church, but also a new generation of filmmakers, born in the 1930s and raised in People's Poland who, who were "ready to use Christian tradition, particularly that of Catholicism, as an inspiration for their oeuvre."[46] The films of Krzysztof Zanussi, Witold Leszczyński and several other filmmakers who debuted in the second half of the 1960s departed from history, national calamities, and socialist takes on modernity. Instead they explored privacy, psychological dilemmas, and metaphysics. Zanussi confronted his audiences with open-ended tales on the human condition, the coexistence of the sacred and the profane, and the role of ethics in everyday life as early as the late 1960s. He continued this approach into the 1970s and 80s, becoming the first director to make a feature film about the youth of John Paul II, Z DALEKIEGO KRAJU (From a Far Country, 1981). Edward Gierek, the First Secretary of the party after December 1970, might have viewed religion as a dying phenomenon, but he also did not ignore its appeal in Poland. He tapped into the congratulatory mood after Karol Wojtyła's election as Pope in 1978 and hosted the new Pontiff in 1979, during the last year of his flagging rule.

The advent of the Cinema of Moral Concern did not introduce a significant line-up of religiously influenced films with the exception of Zanussi's work. The confrontation between the party state and the political opposition that erupted in 1980-81 destroyed Polish artistic cinema. The emigration of a few masters, the voluntary silence of others, the introduction of more rigid censorship, and the promotion of escapism by the state officials in charge of national cinema facilitated a shift to a B-style cinema that had fateful consequences for Polish film after 1989. Krzysztof Kieślowski's belated rise to international prominence following the success of his DEKALOG (Decalogue) TV series based on the Ten Commandments was more an exception than a rule in the Polish cinema of the 1980s.

The collapse of the communist system saw the re-empowerment of the Church, which had found itself as a negotiator between the party state and the Solidarity movement in the second half of the 1980s. One of the side effects of the hegemonic position of the Church was the proliferation of biopics about religious leaders and saints, martyrs and heroes, which were openly apologetic towards the Polish model of Catholicism — the exact oppo-

45) Consider, for example, a German priest baptizing a baby and giving the last rites to members of the Pawlak family, Polish re-settlers in the Western Territories in Sylwester Chęciński's comedy SAMI SWOI (Our Folks, 1967) or a local priest cooperating with a police commander in Stanisław Lenartowicz's CZERWONE I ZŁOTE (The Red and the Gold, 1969).

46) Kornacki, pp. 307–314.

site of the cinema of the Great Novena of the 1960s. In this respect, MOTHER JOAN OF THE ANGELS remains a lone leader in the pantheon of Polish films dealing with religion.[47] Its visual influence on Paweł Pawlikowski's IDA (2014), one of the most important and beautifully filmed Polish movies of the last three decades, which also features a nun as a central character, testifies to the enduring legacy of Jerzy Kawalerowicz's seminal work.

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47) Consider such titles as Teresa Kotlarczyk's PRYMAS. TRZY LATA Z TYSIĄCA (The Primate, 2000), Jerzy Łukaszewicz's FAUSTYNA (1995), Zanussi's ŻYCIE ZA ŻYCIE. MAKSYMILIAN KOLBE (Life for Life. Maximilian Kolbe, 1991), and, above all, Giacomo Battiato's biography of Pope John Paul II, KAROL. CZŁOWIEK, KTÓRY ZOSTAŁ PAPIEŻEM (Karol. A Man Who Became Pope, 2004).

SUMMARY

A Church-State Conflict

Jerzy Kawalerowicz's Mother Joan of the Angels *and Cinematic Projections of Catholicism in Władysław Gomułka's Poland*

Mikołaj Kunicki

Referencing archival sources, movie reviews, secondary sources, and a number of films, this article explores the political controversy that accompanied the domestic release of Jerzy Kawalerowicz's seminal work Mother Joan of the Angels, which occurred at the time of a major conflict between the Catholic Church and the party regime in Poland during the 1960s. It also discusses other films attacked by the Polish episcopate for their alleged anti-Catholicism and examines the relationship between the Polish School and Catholicism. I argue that the government officials responsible for the movie industry as well as most filmmakers steered away from aggressive anti-clericalism and atheist propaganda. By contrast, Polish bishops had no qualms about orchestrating attacks against movies they deemed as anti-Catholic and supported various forms of censorship. In my analysis, the case of Mother Joan of the Angels questions traditional narratives about the Church-State conflict in People's Poland and the cultural policies of the communist regime.